

City of Merced

**PARKS and**

**OPEN SPACE**

**MASTER PLAN**



INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENTAL  
STUDIES LIBRARY

OCT 14 1986

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA





## CITY OF MERCED

City Council

Samuel C. Pipes  
Mayor

Joseph Lara

Tom Archer  
Mayor Pro Tempore

Phyllis Nelson

Bruce Gabriault

Marvin Wells

Michael Mason

Thomas Andrusky  
City Manager

Planning Commission

Frank R. Taylor  
Chairman

Arthur J. Cardoza

Robert T. Haden

A. E. Westmoreland  
Vice-Chairman

Melville H. Shannon

Kenra Bragonier

Russell J. Vara, II

Philip W. Block  
Planning Director

Recreation and Parks Commission

Don Davey  
Chairman

Robert Quaglia

Billie Alexander

Bunny Busby  
Vice-Chairperson


Richard King

John Cullen

Robert Cobb

Craig Smith  
Recreation and Parks Director





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2024 with funding from  
State of California and California State Library

<https://archive.org/details/C124888057>

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

MASTER PLAN

Adopted by:

Merced City Council  
March 19, 1984

Approved by:

Merced City Planning Commission and  
Merced City Recreation and Parks Commission  
February 15, 1984

Prepared by:

Merced City Planning Department  
January 31, 1984



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	iv
SUMMARY . . . . .	v
INVENTORY . . . . .	2
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE . . . . .	4
THE PARK SYSTEM . . . . .	5
Mini-Parks . . . . .	6
Analysis . . . . .	7
Improvements . . . . .	8
Neighborhood Parks . . . . .	8
Analysis . . . . .	9
Improvements . . . . .	11
Community Parks . . . . .	11
Analysis . . . . .	12
Improvements . . . . .	13
Linear Parks . . . . .	14
Analysis . . . . .	14
Improvements . . . . .	15
Regional Parks . . . . .	16
Analysis . . . . .	16
Improvements . . . . .	17
PEDESTRIAN/BICYCLE PATH SYSTEM . . . . .	18
OPEN SPACE . . . . .	20
POPULATION GROWTH PATTERNS . . . . .	24
Population . . . . .	24
Building Activity . . . . .	25
Age Groups . . . . .	26
Household Population and Density . . . . .	26
Do We Presently Have Enough Park Land? . . . . .	27
SELECTING AREAS FOR NEW AND IMPROVED PARKS AND OPEN SPACE . . . . .	29
Future Population and Parks . . . . .	29
Walking Distance . . . . .	31
Barriers to Accessibility . . . . .	33
Facilities . . . . .	34
Joint Use Facilities . . . . .	36
Drainage Basins . . . . .	36
Schools . . . . .	37
Open Space . . . . .	39





	Page
FACTORS USED TO LOCATE NEW PARKS . . . . .	40
KEY PARKS AND OPEN SPACE CONCEPTS . . . . .	42
APPLICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS . . . . .	46
NEW PARK SITES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING EXISTING PARKS . . . . .	47
Proposed Parks and Open Space Master Plan Map . . . . .	48
Rationale Behind Proposed Parks and Open Space Master Plan Map . . . . .	49
IMPLEMENTATION. . . . .	56
History . . . . .	56
Sales Tax Revenue . . . . .	56
Park Fees . . . . .	56
State and Federal Grants . . . . .	57
Current and Future Methods of Financing . . . . .	57
Park Design as it Relates to Maintenance Costs . . . . .	58





## LIST OF MAPS

	Page
Existing Park Sites . . . . .	3
Bicycle Transportation Map . . . . .	19
Open Space Elements . . . . .	21
Large Tracts of Undeveloped Residential Land . . . . .	29
Service Areas of Existing Parks . . . . .	31
Service Areas of Existing Parks and Schools . . . . .	32
Barriers Limiting Accessibility to Parks or Schools . . . . .	33
Composite Map - Future Neighborhoods Without Access to a Park or School . . . . .	35
Drainage Basin Locations . . . . .	36
Parks and Open Space Master Plan . . . . .	48





## PARKS AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

### INTRODUCTION

The City of Merced General Plan deals with parks and open space in a general way.

The major focus of this master plan is to plan for new park sites or expand and improve existing parks. More specifically, the Parks and Open Space Master Plan is an expanded effort to determine what and how many park facilities are needed to best serve the people and where they should be located. Secondly, it allows for a systematic approach for determining priorities of land acquisitions and development of parks and open space. Finally, it serves as a process by which citizens may participate in the planning of new park facilities and open space areas.

Keeping these three general purposes in mind, this document describes the function of a parks system and analyzes the problems and opportunities of each type of park within the system. It examines population characteristics and growth projections and suggests key principles to be followed when developing park sites and selecting new park locations and improvement areas.

New park sites, modifications to existing parks and open space preservation areas have been designated on the Parks and Open Space Master Plan. The Plan is a result of the parks and open space analysis which shows a need for seven new parks and some additions to and redesign of certain existing parks to serve the future population of Merced. Meeting the parks needs will require acquisition and development of specific sites as the population grows. The implementation program depends on a variety of funding sources including federal and state grants, a multi-year Capital Improvement Program and, most important, park fees and land dedication required as residential development occurs. These implementation techniques are also discussed.





## SUMMARY.

The goal of the Master Plan has been to develop a parks and open space system to serve the existing and future population of Merced. As a result, seven new park sites and ten other areas of improvement have been proposed based on the analysis and concepts discussed in this report. These are shown on the proposed Parks and Open Space Master Plan Map (page 48).

Generally, there are four types of parks in Merced: mini, neighborhood, community and linear parks. They form an integrated system of parks and open space throughout the city. Neighborhood and community parks predominate. This is primarily because they provide the widest range of active and passive recreation opportunities. Mini parks supplement the neighborhood parks by providing casual, spur of the moment recreational needs in certain neighborhoods. Linear parks link various parks and neighborhoods, thus forming a system. City school facilities, Lake Yosemite and other County operated facilities, as well as private recreation and fitness clubs, provide additional recreational opportunities to Merced residents.

Open space features are equally important to Merced's parks and open space system. Merced's creeks and canals, significant stands of trees which remain from old farmsteads, the street tree network and the agricultural greenbelt exist because people had the foresight to protect and/or integrate these natural elements into the city. There are other open space elements in the path of city development that also need to be preserved, protected and enhanced.

In terms of the adequacy of the present parks and open space system and its ability to serve the population of Merced, the number of acres of park land, the location of parks and open space, and their accessibility were examined.

It was determined that a sufficient number of parks exist for the city's current population. Most of the city has adequate access to both passive and active recreational opportunities. However, if any sections of the city are deficient in parks and open space at this time, they are within certain central and south Merced neighborhoods. These areas generally have smaller parks and fewer open space areas than other sections of Merced. Residents in these areas presently rely more heavily on nearby schools and the community and regional parks for play and relaxation than do other Merced neighborhoods.

Certain improvements to the present park system have been suggested. These include better visibility and access to and from neighborhood parks,





quality design and maintenance of parks, completion of two of the three existing community parks to increase city-wide recreation facilities and opportunities and expanded connections via linear parks between neighborhoods. These have been identified as key concepts to be followed for the design, establishment and development of parks.

A major weakness in the existing parks and open space system is that relatively little has been done to date to plan for additional parks and open space for future neighborhoods. Selecting new park sites and improvements to existing parks took into account the condition of the present park system as well as growth projections, accessibility constraints and joint use opportunities. Because the majority of Merced's growth is going to occur in the north and south sections of Merced, most of the new park sites were proposed there. Also, a maximum walking distance of  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from a park was determined to be the service area of each park. New park sites were therefore proposed to insure that every neighborhood would have a park within  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile. In addition, new park sites were proposed in locations where other facilities may locate. For instance, park sites were proposed where open space elements exist to take advantage of a creek or a stand of trees. Combined school/park sites and drainage basin/park sites were also considered.

If the proposed Parks and Open Space Master Plan is adopted, the City will be very close to reaching its goal of five acres of park land for every 1,000 people, both for the existing and projected population.

Of course, merely designating parks sites on a map or suggesting improvements for the park system does not bring parks into existence. Land acquisition and park development - implementation - are the keys to the parks and open space system. With State and Federal grant programs diminishing, the acquisition and development of the city's parks will be more dependent on local funding sources. The primary funding source will likely be from park dedication and development fees. These fees are collected only as new residential units are constructed. Thus, the development of future parks is dependent on new construction and will occur only when residential construction takes place. Until then, the proposed Master Plan will insure that land is designated and available to meet the parks and open space needs in all neighborhoods of Merced.



## INVENTORY

The following table and map inventories existing parks within Merced's urban growth area [Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP) area] as of this date. The table categorizes the parks into 4 basic types. Each park is described in terms of acres developed, acres undeveloped and primary facilities.

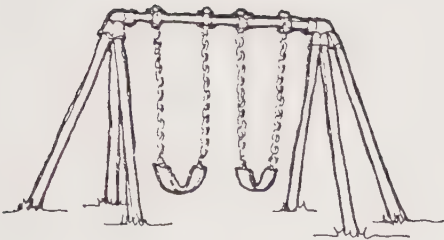
	AMOUNTS OF PARK LAND		
	ACRES DEVELOPED	ACRES UNDE- VELOPED	FACILITIES
COMMUNITY PARKS			
Fahrens Park	5.0	70	playground, bike path
Applegate	23.0		zoo, Kiwanis kiddieland, tennis courts, playground, Rotary scout hut, picnic areas with barbecues, Soroptomist picnic shelter
Joe Herb Park	6.0	11	Kiwanis picnic shelter and barbecue, playground, horseshoe courts, ball- fields
	10.0 under construction		
NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS			
Rahilly	14.7		playground, picnic tables
Burbank	4.0		playground
Courthouse Square (County)	7.0		exercise equipment, benches
Ada Givens Park	10.0		playground, ballfields, swimming pool
Stephen Leonard	2.7		playground, picnic areas, recreation hall
McNamara	7.0		baseball and softball diamonds, swim- ming pool, playground, horseshoe courts, picnic areas with barbecues. recreation hall
Flanagan (County)	3.9		playground
Macias	5.0		picnic shelter, barbecue, playground
MINI-PARKS			
Main Street Square	0.5		benches, kiosk
Circle Drive	0.25		playground
Macready Park	5.0		--
South Merced Mini-Parks (10)	5.5		playgrounds
Patent Nollet	.25		
LINEAR PARKS			
Black Rascal Creek	20.0		playground, pedestrian and bicycle path
Bear Creek (part County)	8.0		exercise equipment, pedestrian and bicycle path
Santa Fe	<u>15.6</u>	—	playground, pedestrian and bicycle path
	153.40	81	





## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Merced is fortunate to have two types of facilities for active and passive recreation and visual attractiveness -- Parks and Open Space.



### PARKS . . .

The purpose of parks is to provide space and facilities for recreation. Recreation primarily is thought of as active play space, such as tennis courts, baseball fields or jogging trails, and facilities, such as swimming pools, playground equipment or hobby rooms. But parks also include areas for passive recreation such as open lawn areas for picnicking and relaxation.



### OPEN SPACE . . .

Open space, on the other hand is generally thought of as an area, small or large, preserved in and for its natural beauty. Open space areas may be part of a larger park, such as the lagoon at Rahilly Park, or stand alone as cool-looking and refreshing vistas, such as the Eucalyptus trees in M Street or Bear Creek or the agricultural land surrounding the City. Open space generally is not used as often or as intensely as recreation parks but they are equally important even to people who never use them but only pass by or look out on them.

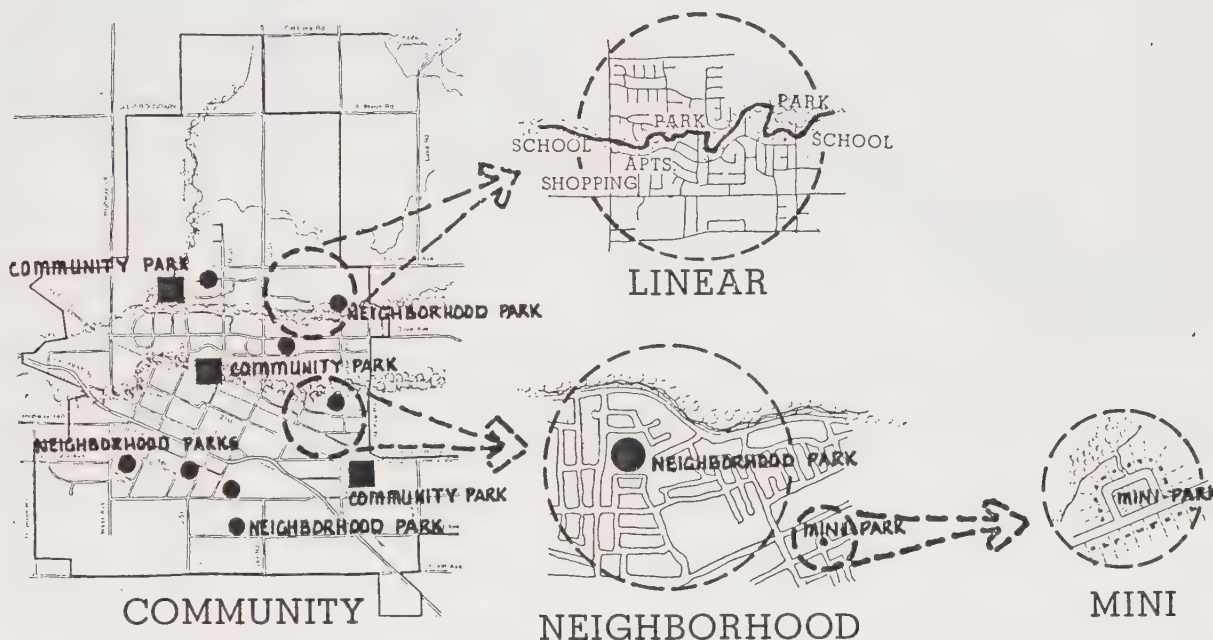
Whether used for active or passive recreation, parks and open space have a decided impact on the total quality of life by providing variety and breathing spaces within the urban environment.





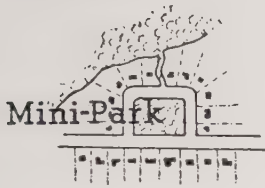
## THE PARK SYSTEM

Generally, city parks are divided into four types: mini, neighborhood, community, and linear. The concept of four types, or hierarchy, provides for park and recreation needs at varying levels; however, there is some overlap among the various types of parks and their uses. Translated into physical form, they create a system of parks. The first three types above provide active play space. The linear parks connect various sites with exclusive paths for pedestrians and bicyclists, helping to link the parks into a system and the park system into the lives of Merced residents. Beyond the city parks are regional parks serving many communities, which are generally provided for by the County.



## THE PARK SYSTEM

## Mini-Parks



### MINI-PARKS . . .

Mini-parks accommodate casual, spur of the moment recreational needs and function more as an extension of the front yards of adjoining residents. Ideally, these spaces should be located so as to relate visually to nearby residences. This helps to establish communication and interaction among neighbors and thus a "mini" neighborhood identity.

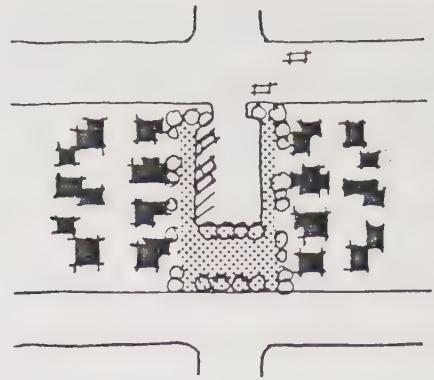
Some examples of mini-parks in Merced are located on Circle Drive near East 23rd Street, on 11th Street between W Street and W Drive, and at 4th and N Streets.

Mini-parks often contain a small amount of play equipment, open lawn area and shade trees.



Where larger parks are not readily accessible to certain residents in the city, mini-parks fill a void. Small open spaces such as these are also a benefit near higher density residential developments, especially when adjacent developments do not include adequate open space and recreational opportunities within their project. Facilities within mini-parks should be flexible but meet the needs of a changing neighborhood population. At the same time they can be tailored to the characteristics of the neighborhood. For instance, tot-lots could be provided in neighborhoods heavily populated by children. Elderly residents may desire meeting places or garden areas. Teen-agers may prefer surfaced courts for ball games, roller skating and skateboarding.

Small parks or open spaces should be provided in multi-family complexes, too.



Analysis. While mini-parks may ideally serve a smaller neighborhood well, they have some shortcomings. First, they are generally inefficient and costly to maintain within the overall park system in the city. It requires more time and money to maintain ten small sites scattered over a 25 block area, such as in South Merced, than it does to maintain one larger park. One way to reduce maintenance costs is to take care in their design and facilities and to choose appropriate landscape materials.

Secondly, while mini-parks provide some recreational opportunities and open space to a neighborhood, they cannot replace neighborhood parks because they are not able to provide a wide range of recreation activities. However, this is not necessarily their purpose. This is why accessible, larger, neighborhood parks are also necessary to serve a number of adjacent mini-neighborhoods.



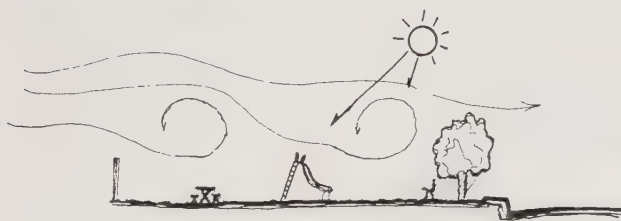
Mini-parks have higher maintenance costs.



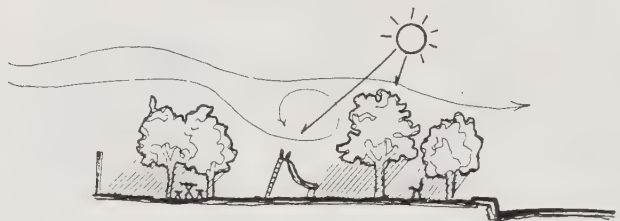
Their limited size precludes certain activities and open space value.



Improvements. To improve the value of Merced's mini-parks more should be done to each to extend their impact. Trees and other vegetation should be planted to provide shade and visual variety to those parks which presently appear barren and somewhat sterile in appearance. Low-level lighting and quality maintenance could also enhance these parks. Some low maintenance design suggestions would be to use natural grasses, more paving and improved irrigation techniques. The less there is to continually maintain the lower the maintenance costs. Due to their current higher maintenance costs, mini-parks should be continually evaluated in terms of design and neighborhood use and demand. They should be created, improved or even eliminated as neighborhood needs dictate.



**BEFORE shade trees**



**AFTER shade trees**

### Neighborhood Parks



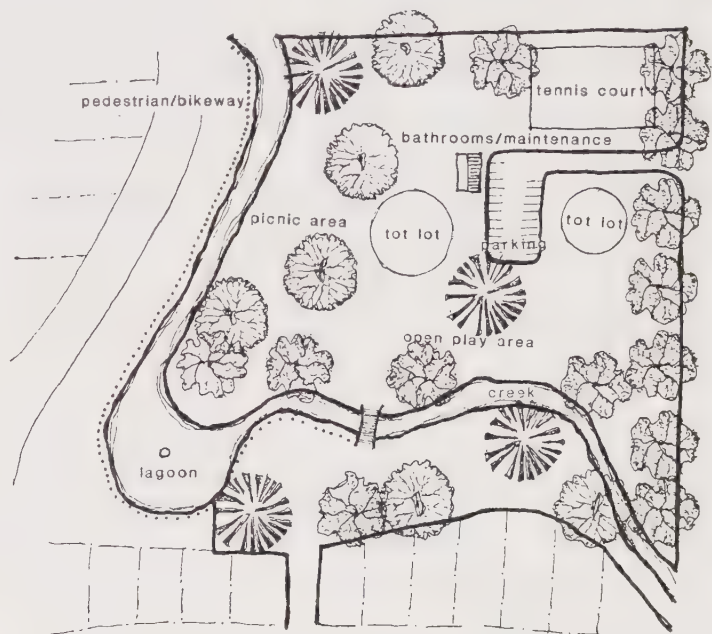
### NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS . . .

Neighborhood parks serve a larger area than a mini-park and have a wider variety of facilities to serve a larger and more diverse population. They generally accommodate an immediate area of approximately 3,000 to 6,000 people. A neighborhood park will normally be 3 to 15 acres in size and be located in the center of a  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 mile square area. Good accessibility, minimum walking distance from nearby mini-neighborhoods and a variety of recreation facilities are key objectives in establishing a neighborhood park. Because of the size and location of neighborhood parks, they are the basic unit in the City's parks and recreation system.

Some examples of neighborhood parks are Stephen Leonard, Burbank, Ada Givens, Rahilly and McNamara Parks. Although McNamara is technically a

neighborhood park and used as such by nearby residents, it is approaching community park status due to the introduction of facilities that would normally be appropriate for city-wide use (i.e., swimming pool, lighted baseball diamonds, community meeting hall). Rahilly Park also attracts city-wide use because of its natural scenic beauty, variety of open space, large size and better design. This points out that, although there is a hierarchy to parks, there also exists certain overlap among the different levels of parks and their uses.

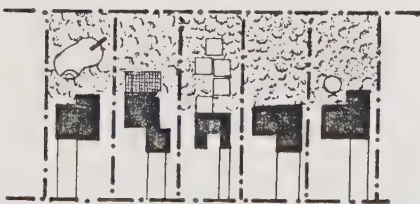
Neighborhood parks provide a variety of recreation and open space elements for all age groups .



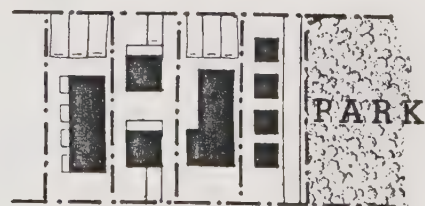
Analysis. A survey shows that the north part of the City is better supplied with neighborhood parks than is the central or south. Not only are there more parks, but they appear to be more attractive. This is true, at least partially, because parks are newer and possibly better designed and maintained. Also, more attractive opportunities exist for park development because of such natural features as creeks and stands of large trees located in the newer developing areas of the City. Years ago the City was able to acquire park lands adjacent to these natural features in advance of development. This process helps ensure that parks will be available and accessible to

future (now existing) neighborhoods. When Merced was originally established, primarily in central and south Merced, emphasis was not on developing parks. Therefore, park land was not acquired or developed at the same rate as today. Now park land is harder to come by as the city developed before significant park sites were acquired. Applegate Park is the one exception.

Another observation is that larger private yards and private amenities, lower densities and lower household sizes exist in the newer subdivisions which tend to reduce the daily need for public recreation areas. But this is where the majority of larger parks are located. Conversely, the need for public recreation opportunity and open space appears greater in higher density and older areas of Merced due to opposite factors mentioned above. But this is where fewer and smaller parks are located. Many residents, especially in south Merced, go outside their neighborhood to use some of the large parks, Applegate in particular. This expands the opportunity for recreation but does not improve the everyday living environment within their neighborhood. In any case, areas of higher densities, larger family size and smaller units need to be relieved through continued park development and enhancement.



Private amenities generally reduce the need for public recreation opportunities, while . . .



fewer private amenities tend to increase the need for common open space.

In terms of locational factors, most existing park sites are well placed and accessible. Those that are adjacent to schools and in the center of a neighborhood appear most used. Also, those that are highly visible and accessible by vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian traffic, and are therefore integrated into the park system, are popular. Burbank and Macias Parks are the two



parks which are used less often because of their relative isolation and lack of accessibility.

Improvements. To supplement the city parks, school playgrounds and playfields can be considered as part of the overall City park system. They provide similar opportunities for recreation because of their size and facilities. Certain design, improvements and cooperation with school officials and nearby residents could help to expand the range of recreation activities and level of use.

Continued efforts to make neighborhood parks accessible and linked among other parks to form a network of parks should be made. This should include vehicular access, high visibility from surrounding streets, as well as bicycle and pedestrian links.

### Community Parks

#### COMMUNITY PARKS . . .

The community park serves the entire city or urban area. It generally serves several neighborhoods and, depending on population density, serves from 15,000 to 20,000 people. A community park is the nucleus of the park system and is usually the location where members of the community congregate for city-wide functions or programs.

The community park is usually over 15 acres in size and includes neighborhood playground facilities as well as appropriate facilities for city-wide use. Or, it may be more open space oriented providing the community a break within the urban environment or contact with nature and pleasant surroundings in which to engage in a variety of active and passive recreational activities.



Features of a community park may include large picnic areas, swimming pool, baseball diamonds, nature trails, soccer fields, playgrounds, zoo, community building or other city-wide activity areas. Examples of community



parks are Applegate and the future Joe Herb and Fahrens Parks. As mentioned earlier, McNamara and Rahilly Parks could also be considered community parks due to city-wide use of certain facilities.

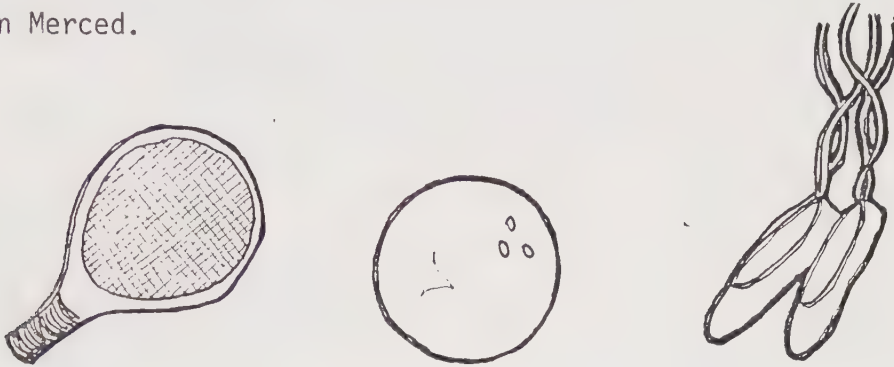


Places where people get together.

Analysis. Given the existing population of Merced, the three proposed community parks, Fahrens, Applegate and Joe Herb Parks, should be adequate. This assumes, however, that there are adequate neighborhood parks to serve basic neighborhood needs. The development of Joe Herb Park will supplement McNamara Park and school facilities such as Rivera and Hoover Schools and Merced College by providing new baseball and soccer facilities for the community. Fahrens Park will offer open space opportunities like Applegate and Rahilly Parks. Community parks are located in all three sections of the city and are therefore accessible to most of the population. This enables the City to provide diversified recreation programs in all areas of Merced to serve all age groups. They range from softball to square dancing to income tax assistance.

○		
RECREATION PROGRAMS		
volleyball	legal counseling	square dancing
macrame	triathlon	dog obedience
piano	health screening	income tax
chess	basketball	assistance
softball	special olympics	after school
painting	youth soccer	recreation
	horseshoes	aerobic dance
		football

In addition to public park facilities and programs there are a number of private or commercial recreational facilities serving the community. These extend the recreation opportunities for Merced residents. Included are racquet ball courts, bowling lanes, swimming pools, various church-operated facilities, local gyms and fitness clubs, and the nearby golf courses. Private and commercial facilities are a valued supplement to the recreation programs offered in Merced.

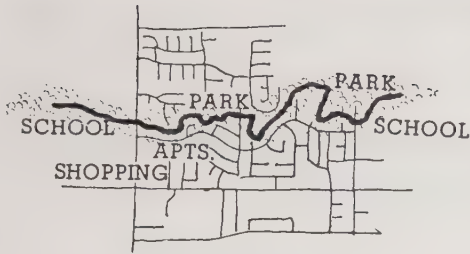


Improvements. Completion of Joe Herb and Fahrens Parks will greatly contribute to the city park system. Also, provision of diverse recreation programs to complement the community parks should continue. Soccer fields and a second swimming pool in South Merced are two short-term needs which should be addressed.



Continued association with local school districts to allow sharing of facilities between the city and the schools for city-wide recreation should be encouraged. City-sponsored soccer, volleyball and softball programs have grown substantially to the point that the city must be able to utilize school facilities in order to accommodate the large number of participants.

## Linear Parks



### LINEAR PARKS . . .

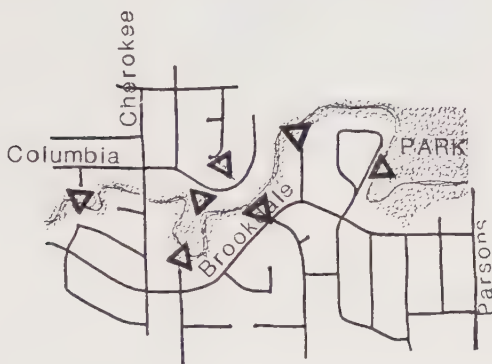
Linear parks connect the various park sites with paths exclusively for pedestrians and bicyclists. The linear parks weave through the residential neighborhoods connecting larger public uses (schools, open space, commercial uses) and provide many points of physical and visual access to the park sites. Some linear parks may also act as a mini-park because of play and exercise equipment placed along the paths. Other linear parks act as a valuable greenbelt of open space through a neighborhood.

People generally use linear parks for walking, jogging, bicycling, roller skating, or just enjoying open space. The original linear parks in Merced were dedicated by subdividers to provide passive recreation and open space within a development. Later the linear parks were connected via the Bear Creek and Black Rascal Creek Bikeways. Thus, a network of paths was developed linking certain neighborhoods within Merced, generally along creekside open spaces, to schools, the college and commercial uses. Since that time, the City and County have worked cooperatively to form a system of paths in and around the Merced area. Also, access points and minor greenbelt systems have been encouraged to connect higher density areas and neighborhoods with the present main system of paths.

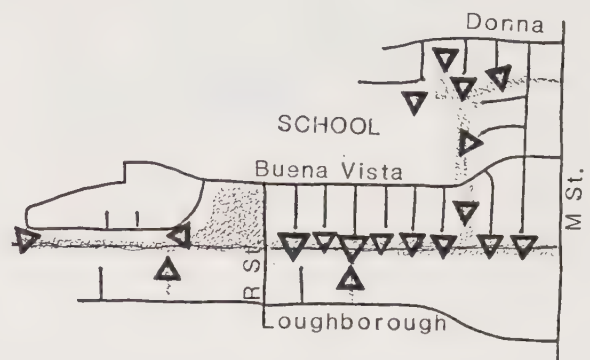
Analysis. The linear park concept has a far-reaching effect on the quality of life in Merced. It has helped in preserving natural resources and it provides safe access to parks that may otherwise be unreachable to many residents. Unfortunately, the linear park concept has generally only been attainable along stream courses and in some new subdivisions where foresight and design dictated a system of trails and open space. In other words, it has been difficult to create linear parks in much of the existing urbanized and developed areas. An overall park system was not envisioned and therefore easements were not initially provided.

Also, the maintenance cost of linear parks can be high if care is not taken in their design and selection of plant materials. This has been a problem in the past.

An important element in the design of linear parks is access. Access has a major effect on whether a linear park is used. If a linear park is hidden, tucked away in a neighborhood, enclosed by high fences and unmaintained, people are generally not going to find them inviting. In fact, they may be seen as an unsafe place to be.



Limited number of access points (▼) isolates neighborhood from linear park.



Many access points (▼) integrate neighborhood into the park system.

Improvements. It may be possible to create the linear park effect in other ways such as closing or narrowing certain streets to create a path system or special tree planting to enhance the corridors between parks. Beautification of railroad easements or drainage courses could also add to the linear concept.

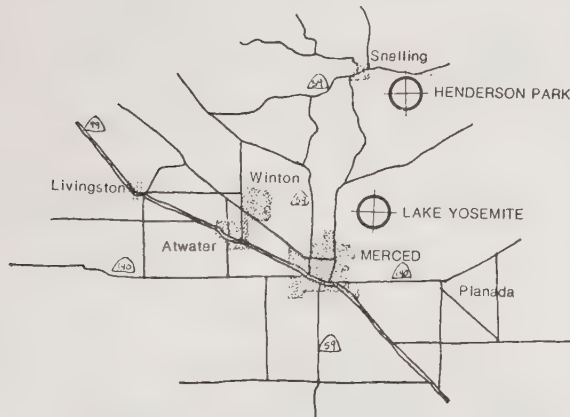
Higher density developments should be encouraged to incorporate the linear park concept where practical, if merely for the open space value.

Connections to and from parks are critical in order to provide access to and to maximize the potential of our park system. Trails and paths should extend beyond the present City boundaries to include connections with Lake Yosemite, nature trails along Fahrens Creek and potential use of existing canals in south Merced where natural open space features are lacking. Early



development, including land acquisition, easements and planting of trees, especially in south Merced, will help assure that a quality park environment is created and used in the future.

### Regional Parks



#### REGIONAL PARKS . . .

Regional parks serve many cities and are sometimes used as resting stops for travellers. Often their focal points are lakes, rivers or other natural resources. Typically they are provided by counties and the state. Because of their distance from a city, their accessibility is generally limited to those who can drive there.

Nearby regional parks include Lake Yosemite and Henderson Parks. Both of these locations are operated by Merced County. Lake Yosemite Park is of special interest to Merced because of its water recreation opportunities and open space qualities. These are important because of the valley's dry climate.

Henderson Park is of less regional importance to Merced because it is 20 miles away. However, it does provide for different types of recreational activities for Merced residents who are able to get there. It includes a large expanse of open space, natural trails, fishing, picnicking and a large clubhouse in a rural setting.

Analysis. Lake Yosemite will likely become more heavily used by city residents as Merced grows. Major residential expansion is planned for the north Merced area making Lake Yosemite even more accessible. This in turn could have an impact on the number of non-city people using our community and other parks.

Improvements. A bike path presently connects Merced with the Lake along Yosemite Avenue and Lake Road. Thus, bicycling to the Lake has become a popular recreation activity. Future trails should be designed to connect other sections of Merced with the Lake; for example, a Fahrens Creek to Old Lake Road to the Lake bike path and Black Rascal Creek to Lake Road to the Creek off-street bike path. Also, a nature trail around the Lake itself would add to the recreational opportunities offered at this park. The present trail system ends near the entrance to the park. There are many other possibilities for Lake Yosemite Park such as expanded picnic areas, a public golf course, play areas, etc.



## PEDESTRIAN/BICYCLE PATH SYSTEM

Bicycling and jogging along the bike paths have become increasingly popular activities among all age groups in Merced. Merced has both a favorable climate and terrain to encourage the use of bicycles for both recreation and transportation functions. As the use of bicycles has increased, a network of paths has been provided to supplement both the parks and recreation system and the transportation system. In fact, the pedestrian/bicycle path network has had a significant influence on the creation of linear parks, a major element in this Parks and Open Space Master Plan.

A Bicycle Transportation Plan has been jointly adopted by the City and County. It designates bicycle routes, both on-street and off-street, through the Merced area to serve existing and future Merced residents. The map on the following page shows the bicycle path system.

Of most importance to the Parks and Open Space Master Plan are the off-street bike paths. These are called Class I bikeways. These types of paths are completely separated from automobile traffic and are often found along the creeks and in some cases along busy streets such as Lake Road or the center median of M Street. Other opportunities may exist for Class I paths such as along railroad corridors or within linear parks in new subdivisions.

The on-street bike paths are called Class II, which are striped lanes on a street specifically for bicycles, or Class III, which are streets without striped lanes but designated by signs as a bike route. The majority of the City's bikeways are Class II or III. However, these have less of an effect on the parks system and are intended primarily to furnish direct routes of access for bicyclists between major destinations.



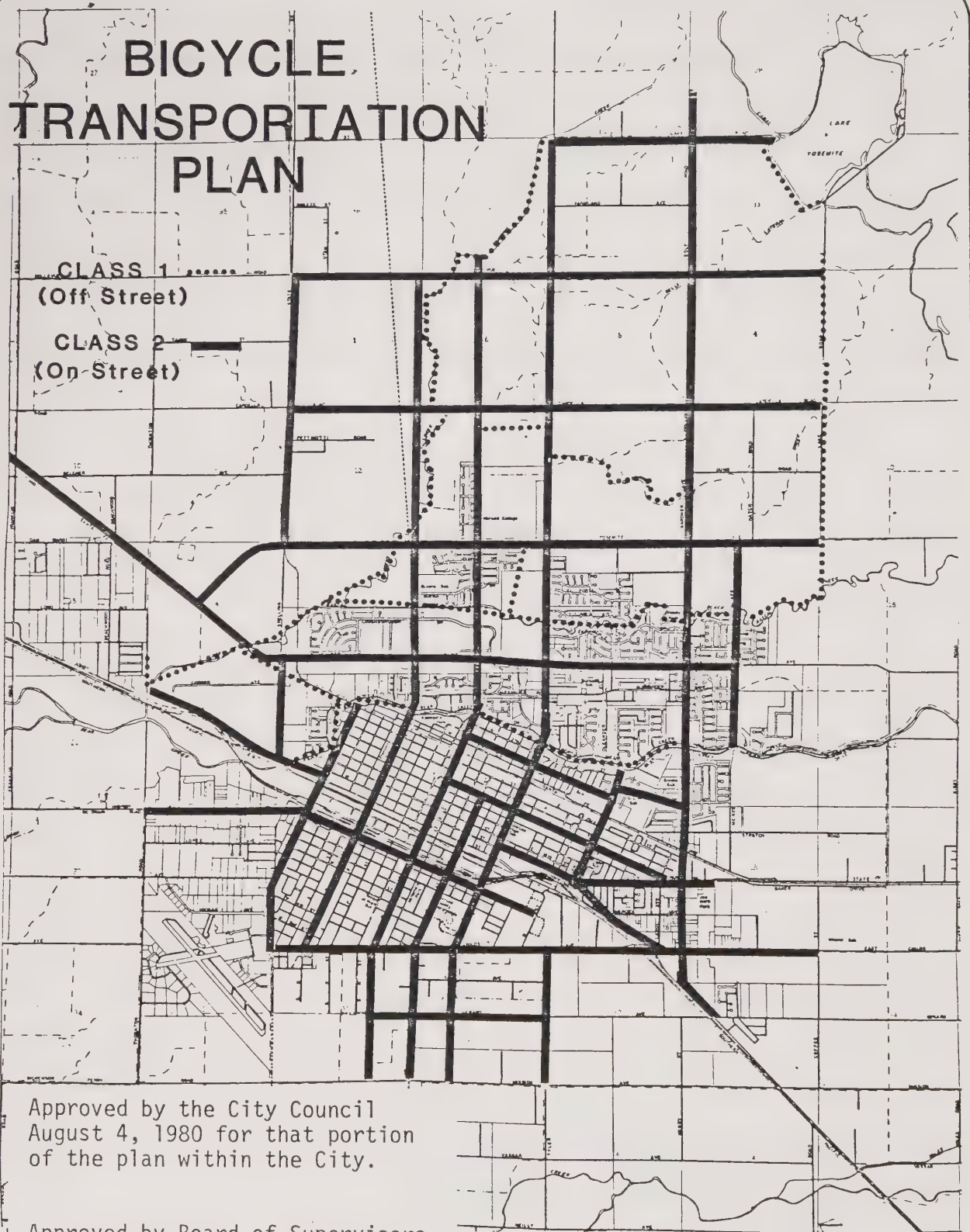
# BICYCLE TRANSPORTATION PLAN

CLASS 1 .....  
(Off Street)

CLASS 2 ———  
(On Street)

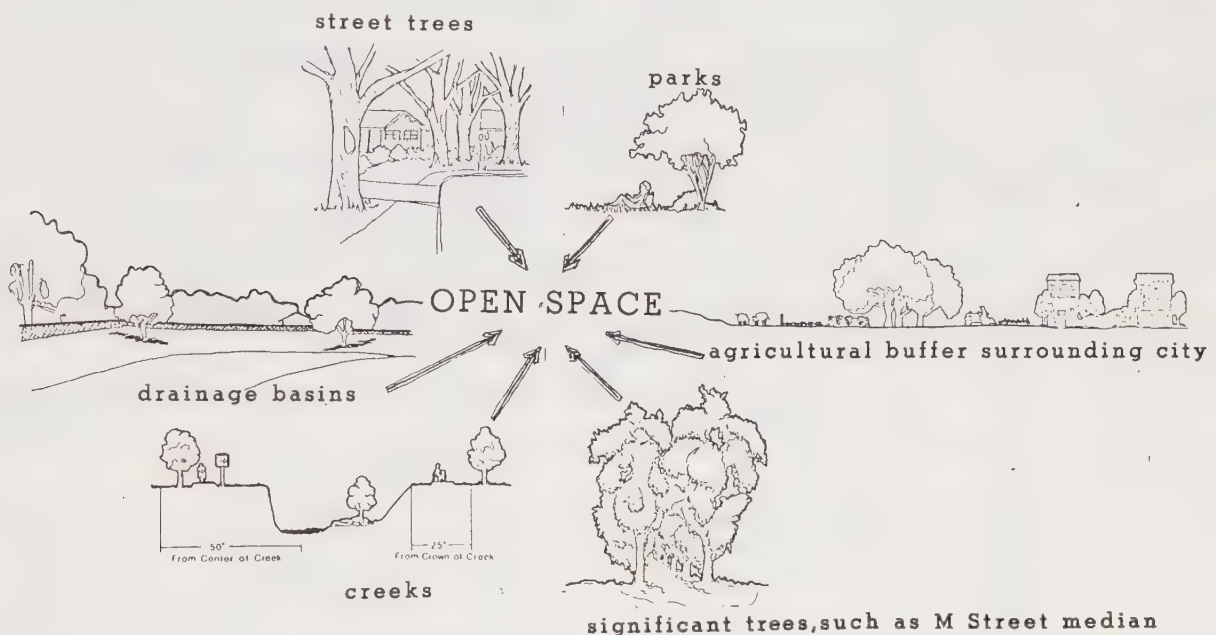
Approved by the City Council  
August 4, 1980 for that portion  
of the plan within the City.

Approved by Board of Supervisors,  
November 4, 1980.



## OPEN SPACE

Open spaces are areas of natural beauty found within an urban environment. It could be a hilltop or a stream or even a row of mature street trees. These elements help to keep a person in touch with the natural environment and offer "breathing spaces" amidst the built-up environment. Open spaces in the form of a vista or a park-like setting are often focal points of a neighborhood or even an entire city. The agricultural greenbelt defines the city. Merced has numerous open space features, such as Court House Square, Bear and Black Rascal Creeks, street trees on 21st and 27th Streets, M Street Eucalyptus trees, etc. Natural resources need protection because they are non-renewable in many instances, often take years to develop and mature, and are relatively scarce within the Merced area. The following map depicts specific types of valued open space resources within Merced and its growth area.



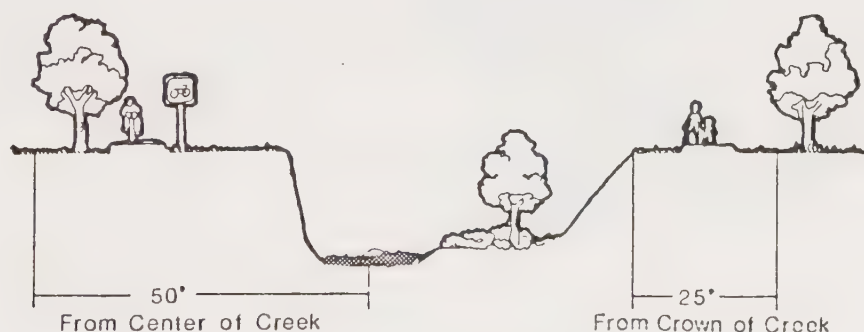
## OPEN SPACE ELEMENTS





These places and vistas exist because people had the foresight to protect and/or integrate natural elements into the development of the city. There are other open space features in the path of future city development as we expand that also need to be preserved, protected and enhanced.

Open space preservation reflects the important values by which we live. Decisions affecting open space require thoughtful weighing of community objectives. For instance, a city should promote residential and commercial expansion as well as leisure opportunities to remain economically viable. The inherent beauty of natural resources, the feeling of openness and the image of a natural environment must not be squeezed out to make room for just urban development. Choices and compromises between open space preservation and urban development are unavoidable but can be mitigated through proper planning. A good example occurred in 1980 when the City clarified its policy regarding dedication of land along creeks, e.g., Black Rascal Creek. Previously it had been requiring dedications of only 50 feet from the centerline of creeks. The new policy that evolved ended up being a minimum of 50 feet or 25 feet from the crown of the creek, whichever is greater. It would have been nice to have had more area; however, this serves as a reasonable compromise between preserving critical open space and minimizing land dedication requirements to help protect against unreasonable land costs.



## CREEKSIDE DEDICATION REQUIREMENTS



The Merced community has shown continued commitment by taking steps to preserve and manage its valued natural resources. The General Plan states several goals and policies regarding the value of open space including joint efforts between City and County to preserve natural resources, preserving prime agricultural lands, maintaining creek channels in their natural state, incentives to design open spaces into new developments and encouraging a city-wide street tree program. In fact, the city has recently been awarded the title of "Tree City USA".



Street Trees

## POPULATION GROWTH PATTERNS

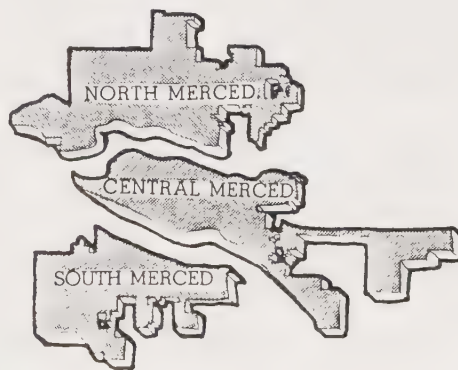
Over the years, Merced has grown steadily. More and more people create a need for more parks and recreation programs as existing ones become overloaded. To design parks and facilities which meet the needs of the existing and future population, growth patterns must be considered.

Current and projected population, their age and economic level, and how many people are sharing a home all effect the need for parks, recreation and open space in terms of size, location and diversification or programs. Also, neighborhood density, barriers to access and building activity in expanding areas of Merced all help to determine where parks should be and what facilities should be provided.

### Population

The 1983 population of Merced was 42,096. Merced has shown substantial growth over the past eight years, increasing by almost 12,000 people (over 4% per year). At this rate Merced will reach close to 80,000 by the year 2000. This increase in population should reflect a corresponding increase in parks and recreation programs - twice as many people will require, more or less, twice as much park land, recreation programs and open space.

Three areas of Merced used  
for statistical purposes.



However, population growth has not been even throughout the City in the last few years. The 1980 census shows that the major part of the growth has

occurred in North Merced. Over half of the new residents live north of Bear Creek. The South Merced population also increased and is growing even more as a result of the influx of Southeast Asian people to Merced. These people have tended to locate in South and Central Merced areas. Central Merced has grown less rapidly but still has the most people compared to the north and south Merced neighborhoods. New park sites should be given special emphasis in both the northern and southern sections of Merced because of the population growth trends described above.

### Building Activity

Increases in population have a direct correlation with building activity -- more people require more homes. Like population, a majority of the recent building activity has occurred north of Bear Creek. In fact, 65% of the homes built between 1975 and 1980 were built in North Merced. Since 1980, approximately 83% of the residential construction has occurred in North Merced. Central Merced is growing less rapidly with 16% of the new construction since 1975 and South Merced building activity has grown 14% since 1975.

Part of this vast difference in building activity can be explained by the amount of developable land in each section of town. Central Merced is primarily developed except for some areas toward the southeast. Thus, only infill development on fairly small parcels is occurring. North Merced has great opportunity for development. It has large tracts of undeveloped land which has attracted developers in recent years to build large subdivisions. South Merced also has great amounts of undeveloped land; however, it generally has been less appealing to developers. Recently, though, there has been more interest shown by developers to build in the south Merced area. This may be especially true in the near future as south Merced has existing sewer capacity while north Merced has limited capacity at this time.

Again, if new parks are needed, it appears that target areas should be in the north and south portions of the community. Designating park sites here would insure that parks and open space are provided for future neighborhoods as well.

### Age Groups

Diversity of age groups within the population also has an effect on the type and amount of parks. It is generally recognized that children, families with children and the elderly are the most frequent users of parks and open space. Components of a park or an open space feature will vary depending on the user need. Garden areas, civic buildings, park benches, tot lots, basketball courts, golf courses, swimming pools, barbecue facilities, etc. all cater to specific age groups.

Children, 0 - 14, make up almost one-third of Merced's population and the elderly, 65+, make up about 10%. The balance are adults comprising over half of the population. Although the number of children is fairly evenly distributed throughout the city, children in south Merced make up a greater percentage of that area's population. Similarly, the elderly appear to be more concentrated in the central area of Merced. In general, this would mean that more child- and family-related facilities should be located in southern Merced and more elderly-related facilities should be provided in Central Merced. North Merced has a greater percentage of adults and thus should have more adult and family-related facilities.

### Household Population and Density

Household size and persons per room can also reflect a need for more outdoor activity space. The more people occupying confined quarters will



generally dictate a greater need for a variety of recreational opportunities. It is also recognized that higher density neighborhoods and people living in multi-family developments produce a greater need for outdoor recreation and open space.

Residents are generally living more compactly in South Merced than in other sections of town in terms of people per household, people per room and a greater number of people living in multi-family developments. In broad terms this means less private indoor space, less semi-private yard space and less public space per person. Thus, a greater need for more "space" in general may be necessary. Parks, community buildings, community gardens, recreation programs, open space, street trees, quiet study areas, outdoor amenities (pools), etc. all contribute to an added feeling of personal "space" when the residential environment is compact.

#### Do We Presently Have Enough Park Land?

A general formula used by many parks and recreation experts, as well as by the City of Merced, is to have five acres of park land for every thousand residents. In addition to the five acres of park land per thousand people, the parks and open space system is supplemented by school grounds, church grounds, Lake Yosemite, private fitness clubs and such. These supplemental recreation opportunities are not included in the standard. In terms of acquiring park land, Merced is virtually on target using this standard for the current population. The City has acquired approximately 234 acres of park land within the City which translates into a user population of 45,000. However, in terms of developed parks, only about 153± acres have been developed into usable parks and open space at this time resulting in 3.4 acres of park land per thousand people. The undeveloped park land is the future Fahrens and

Joe Herb Parks. While it may appear that a current deficiency exists since the five acres per thousand standard has not yet been met, the land has already been acquired to reach this goal. Development of the remaining park land will occur as revenue is secured.

Using this five acres per thousand population formula the greatest deficiencies in park land are in Central and South Merced which generally have smaller park sites than North Merced. However, the proposed parks and open space plan map (page 48) shows that the proposed facilities will generally create a balance of park acreage among all sections of Merced.

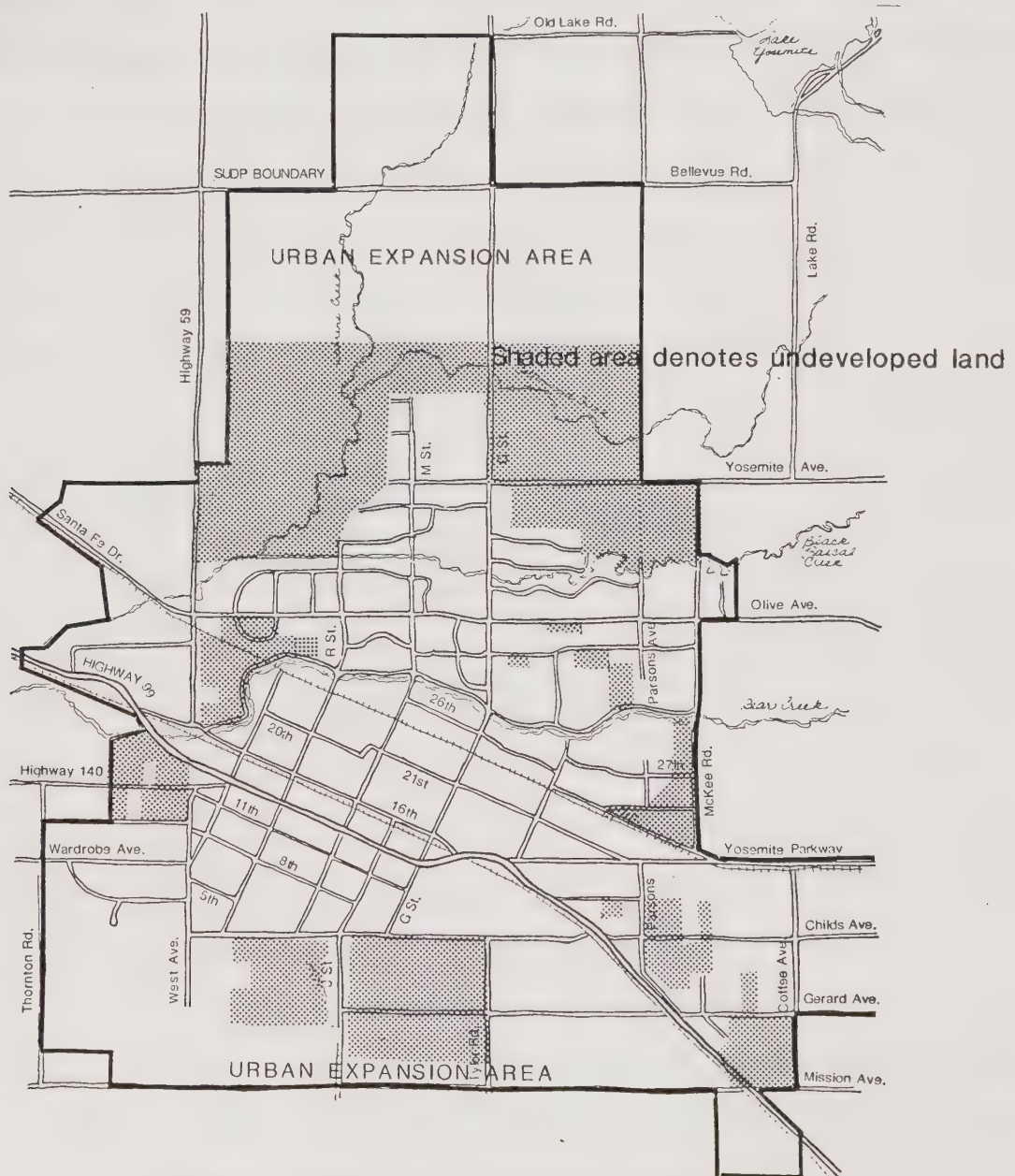
	Acreage Standard/ 1,000 Population	Dedicated Park/ 1,000 Population	Developed Park/ 1,000 Population	Proposed Parks as shown on Master Plan Plan (p. 48)/ 1,000 Population	Proposed Parks Plus Existing Parks/ 1,000 Population
South Merced	5.0	5.5 acres	3.1 acres	4.8 acres	4.1 acres
Central Merced	5.0	3.4 acres	3.4 acres	1.0 acres	3.6 acres
North Merced	5.0	10.9 acres	5.2 acres	2.5 acres	5.1 acres
City-Wide		5.6 acres	3.4 acres	1.1 acres	4.4 acres

It is important to keep in mind that the adequacy of Merced's park system should not merely be judged on the ratio of park acreage to total population. Location, facilities and user demand are equally important.

SELECTING AREAS FOR NEW AND  
IMPROVED PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Future Population and Parks

There are approximately 3,275 undeveloped residential acres within the Merced Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP) boundary, excluding urban expansion areas.



**LARGE TRACTS OF UNDEVELOPED  
RESIDENTIAL LAND**

If these undeveloped areas are developed as designated on the General Plan, Low Density, Low Medium Density and High Medium Density, the projected new population within these areas would be near 48,000.

	<u>South Merced</u>	<u>Central Merced</u>	<u>North Merced</u>	<u>Total</u>
undeveloped - acres	869.5	509	1,895	3,273.5
- units	4,227	3,961	11,314	19,502
- people	11,353	8,678	27,928	47,959

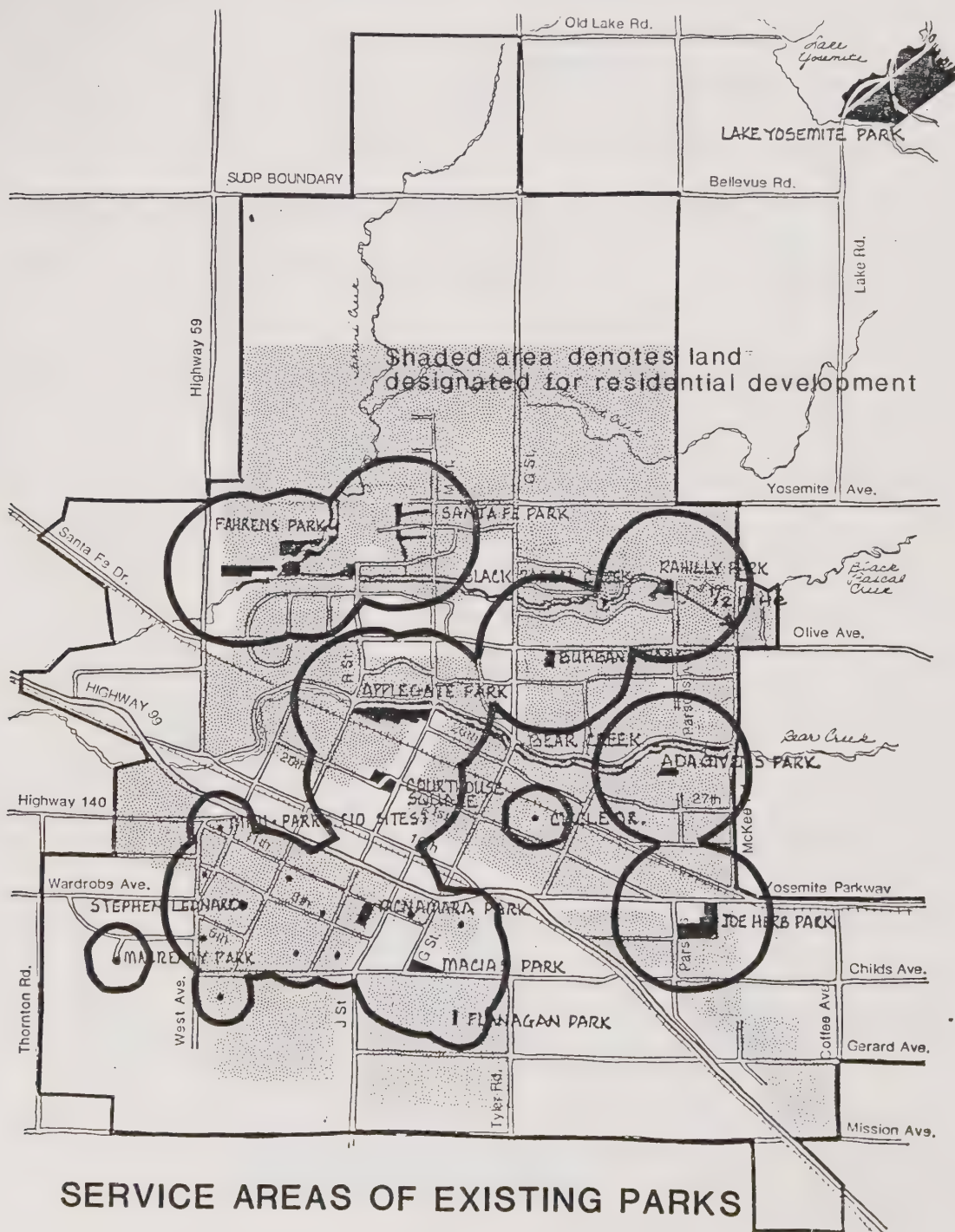
At this time Merced does not have the dedicated park land to accommodate this growth. Therefore, new park sites must be planned for, selected, dedicated and funded, beginning as soon as possible. It will be too late to obtain the required park acreage if development precedes park dedication. That is why planning for new sites or expanding and improving existing ones is the major focus of this master plan.

Of course, there are many other factors besides population growth when selecting new park sites, expanding and improving existing parks and providing diverse recreation programs. Some are:

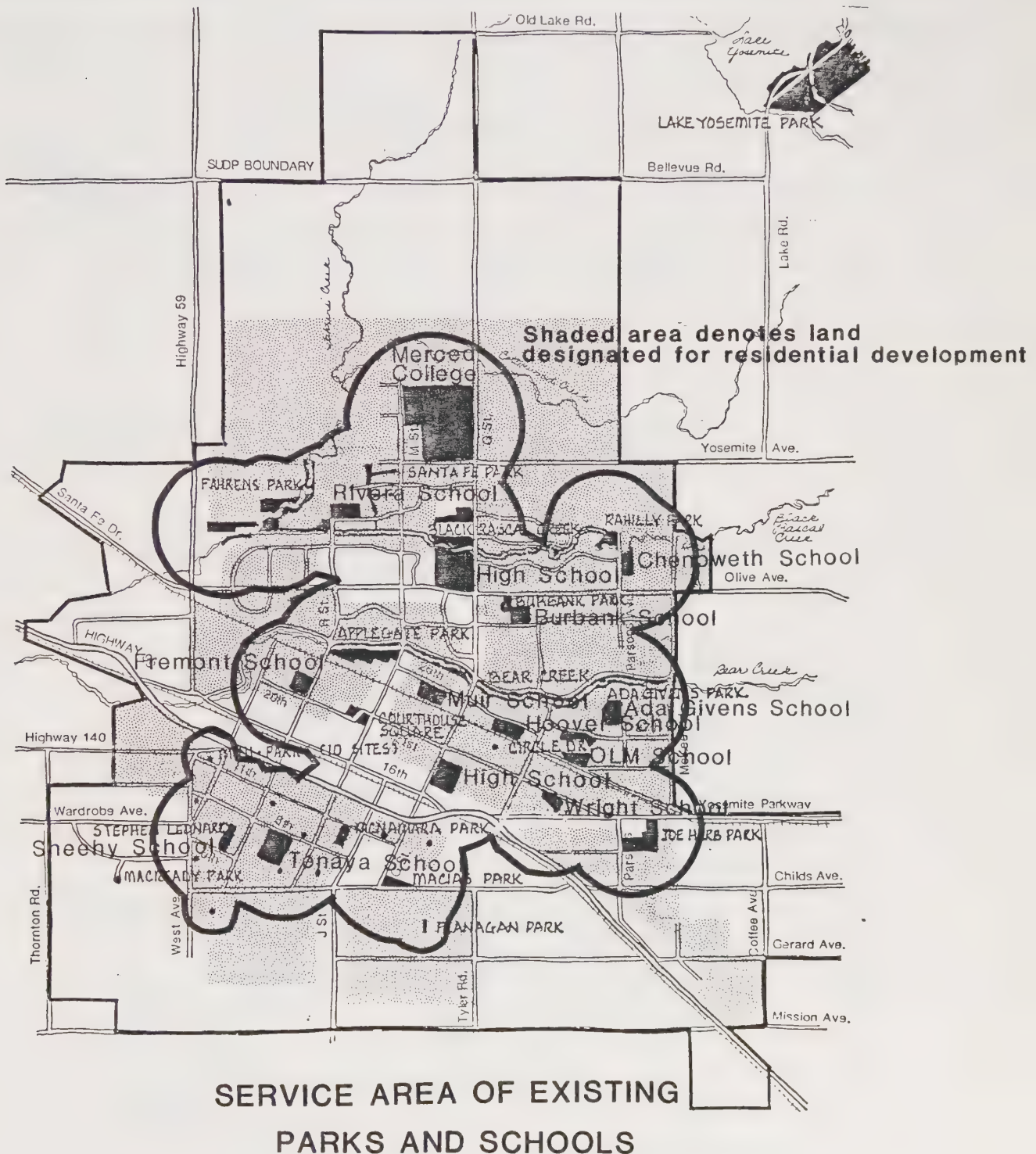
- ★ **Walking Distance**
- ★ **Barriers To Accessibility**
- ★ **Facilities**
- ★ **Drainage Basins**
- ★ **Schools**
- ★ **Open Space**



Walking Distance. In order for a park to be used by a neighborhood population it must be nearby. About a half-mile walk should be the greatest distance a person should have to go to get to a park. This would be a 10-15 minute walk for a normal adult. Children may not travel this far or may not be permitted by a parent to travel this far. In very general terms a half-mile radius from each park describes a service area for each park.



As shown on the previous map, most neighborhoods have a park nearby. In combination with schools, virtually all of the developed portion of the city is within half mile of a park or a school as shown below.





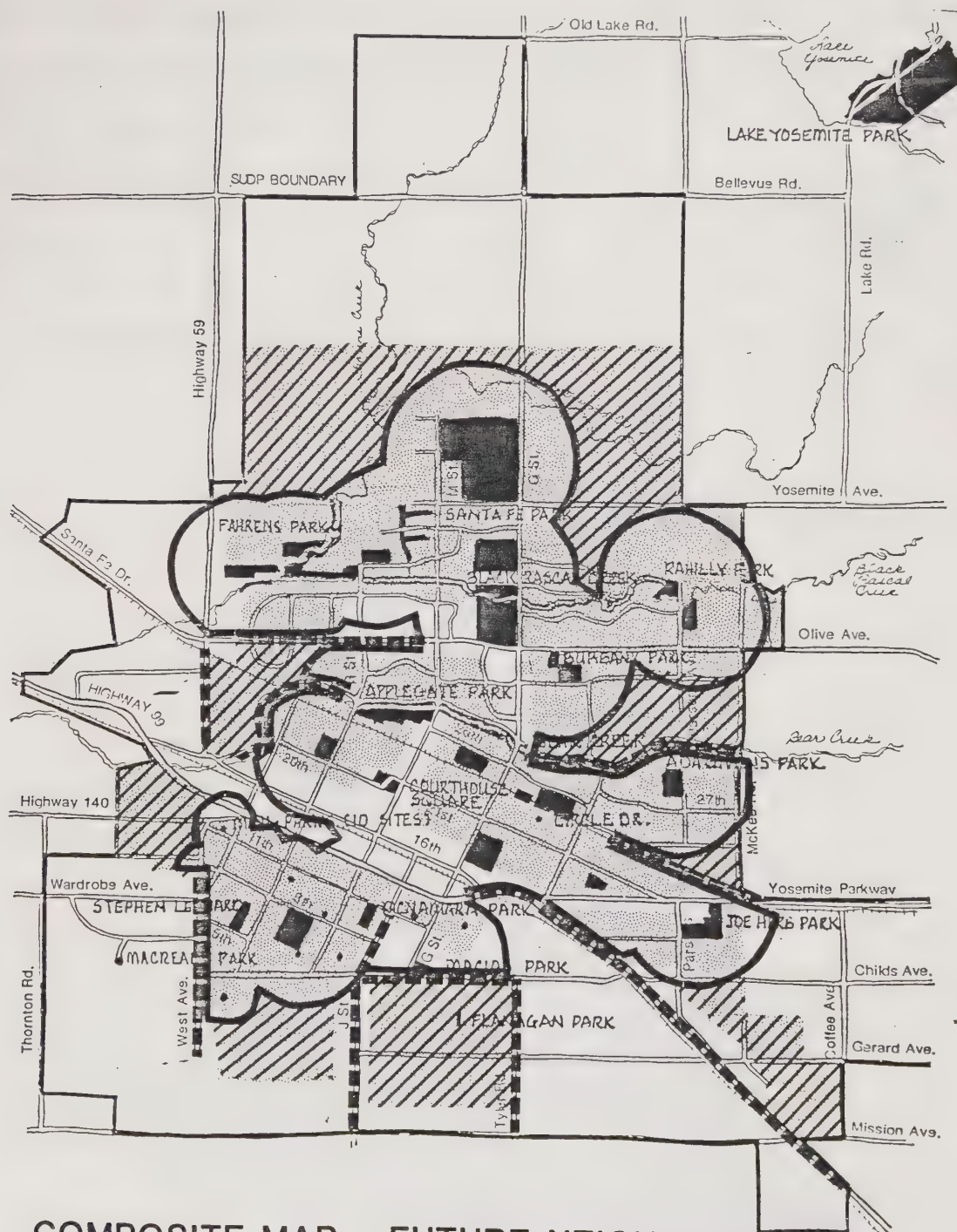
Barriers to Accessibility. Both new and old park sites must be accessible to surrounding residents. Barriers are natural or man-made forms which restrict or prohibit access to parks. Examples include highways and busy streets, railroads, creeks, street patterns, and a large expanse of commercial development which deter people from using a park because it is difficult and inconvenient to get to.



Facilities. Recreation programs are dependent on the availability of proper facilities. For instance, the soccer program needs large play fields, volleyball needs net courts and basketball needs gym courts. Therefore, facilities needs should be examined when selecting a park site especially as it relates to required size (acres) and desired location. Once a park site is selected, design and flexibility of facilities should be addressed. An established neighborhood will evolve from children who use tot lots to teenagers who use basketball courts to adults who use softball fields to elderly who prefer garden areas and back again to children. Certain facilities tailored to a specific group could be sadly out of date as needs change over the next few decades.



Assembling all of this information together, the following map reveals where existing parks are not serving the existing or future population within the residential growth area.



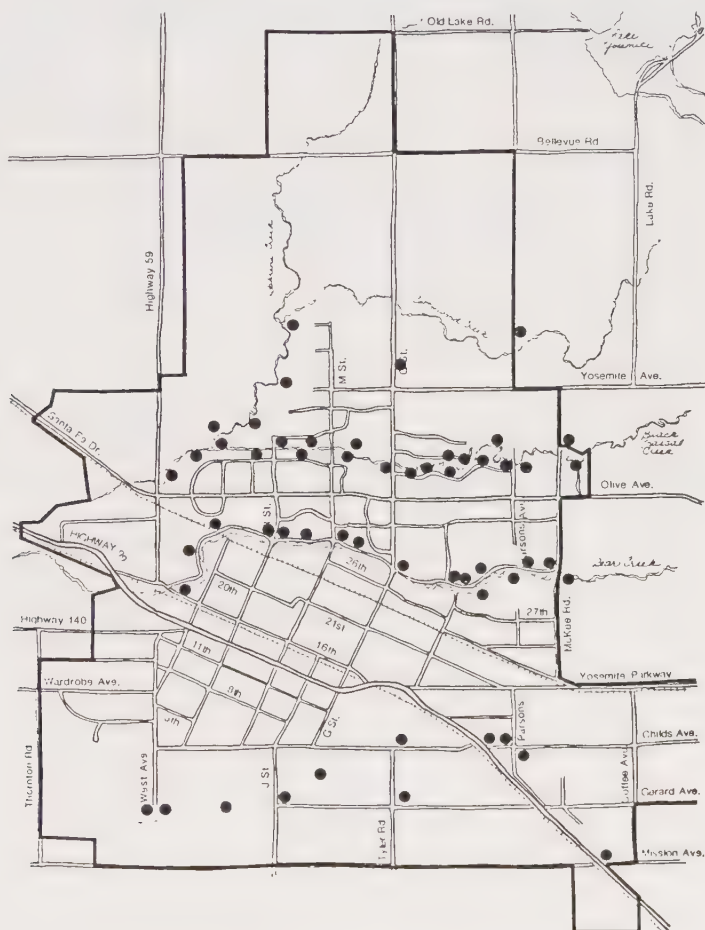
**COMPOSITE MAP - FUTURE NEIGHBORHOODS  
WITHOUT ACCESS TO A  
PARK OR SCHOOL**

(Denoted by Hatched Lines)

## Joint Use Facilities

There are three other design opportunities which should be considered. Drainage basins, schools and open space are all requirements of the City of Merced which have common elements, such as large amounts of land, open turf, landscaping and possibly recreation opportunities. To maximize the use of valuable land and reduce the amount of designated residential land taken by these required features, some of these features should be combined.

Drainage Basins. Some type of ponding basins are a requirement of the recently adopted Critical Area Drainage Plan. This drainage plan requires storm drainage be retained in specified locations or ponds to regulate flow into drainage channels. The plan calls for ponding basins in the general locations as shown on the following map.



**DRAINAGE BASIN LOCATIONS**

While these basins may be designed as just that, a deep pit containing drainage water, the City has adopted a policy to design them as open space or park-like features in residential areas--a shallow, more broad depression with turf, trees and perhaps some recreation equipment in selected locations. To maximize the use of land, serious consideration should be given to combining the need for future parks and future drainage basins in the same location, by appropriate design, while at the same time providing for the needed and desired recreation activities and programs.

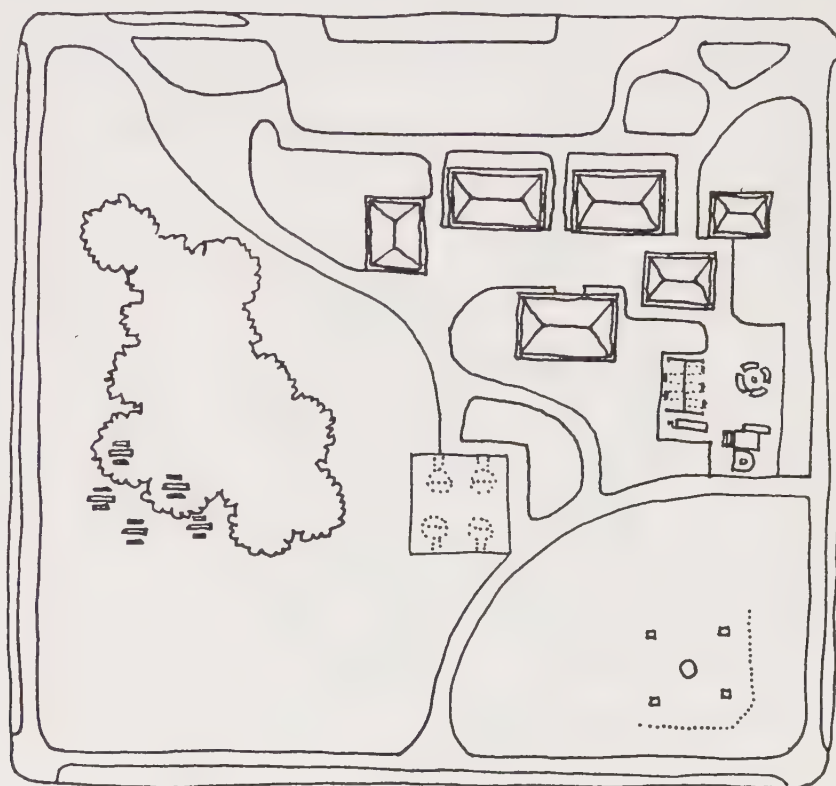


Joint use drainage basin and park.

Schools. School facilities act as a supplement to the park system already. They provide virtually the same active recreation facilities and opportunities as a typical park. Passive recreation facilities are usually somewhat lacking though with school yards. The City of Merced and three local school districts, Merced High School, Merced City Schools and Merced Community College, have worked closely in the past to share facilities and programs.

Recently, the City and school districts have gone even further to promote development and design of combined facilities on one site, incorporating active and passive recreation opportunities. Ada Givens and Burbank School/Parks are two examples. These efforts should be continued when new school sites are considered in all school districts within the city. In addition, potential still exists to redevelop existing school sites into more park-like settings.

Joint use school and park.







Open Space. Merced is fortunate to have open space features scattered throughout and surrounding the City. Many are valued in and of themselves while others are a portion of a larger park. Emphasis should be continued to locate new park sites in areas where existing open space features exist. This not only preserves the features but also creates a unique and often mature park at the initial development stage. Windrows of mature eucalyptus trees, creek or irrigation channels, and wildlife habitat areas are all elements which could be incorporated into parks thereby achieving a joint goal: preservation and enhancement of Merced's parks and open space. Fahrens Park and Rahilly Park are excellent examples of joint open space and park.

Joint use open space and park.





## FACTORS USED TO LOCATE NEW PARKS

Merced has a sufficient number of parks, or has acquired a sufficient number of acres for park development, to accommodate the existing population. This achieves the goal of five acres of park land per thousand people. However, it also assumes that five acres per thousand is an adequate standard. Combined with school yards and open space, most of the City has adequate access to both passive and active recreation opportunities. If any section of town is deficient in acres of park land, it is South and Central Merced, which generally have smaller parks than other sections of Merced.

However, in the future a closer look at how people use and get to parks, where emerging neighborhoods develop, as well as growth and composition of the new population may require modifications or additions to our present park system.

Factors which influence the type and amount of parks needed are the location of population, building activity, living in a compact environment and the age of the population. In general, the majority of the recent and projected population increases as well as the recent and projected building activity is in the northern and southern sections of Merced. This means that new park sites and improvements to existing parks should be concentrated in these areas.

Higher density neighborhoods are more evident in South Merced at this time. However, future high density developments will be located in north Merced. Living in a compact neighborhood generally dictates a need for more outdoor activity space. Future parks and open space should be incorporated within or nearby these multi-family developments.

Users of parks tend to be children, elderly and parents with children. Park facilities should be tailored for use by the majority of the surrounding

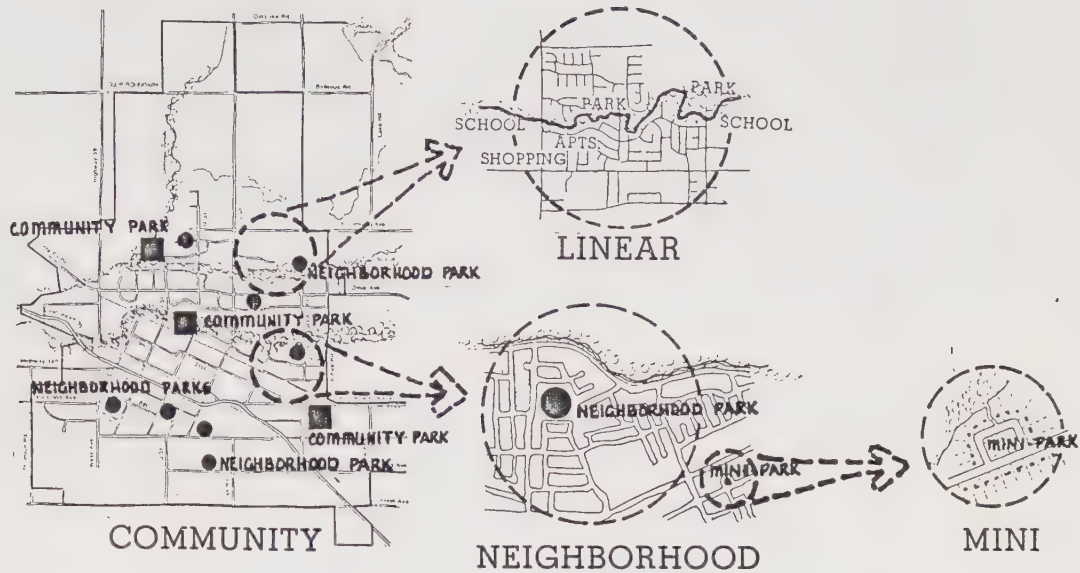


population. Child-oriented programs should be located in north and south Merced as children make up much of the areas population. Elderly-oriented programs should be located in central Merced as the majority of elderly have tended to live in the downtown area.

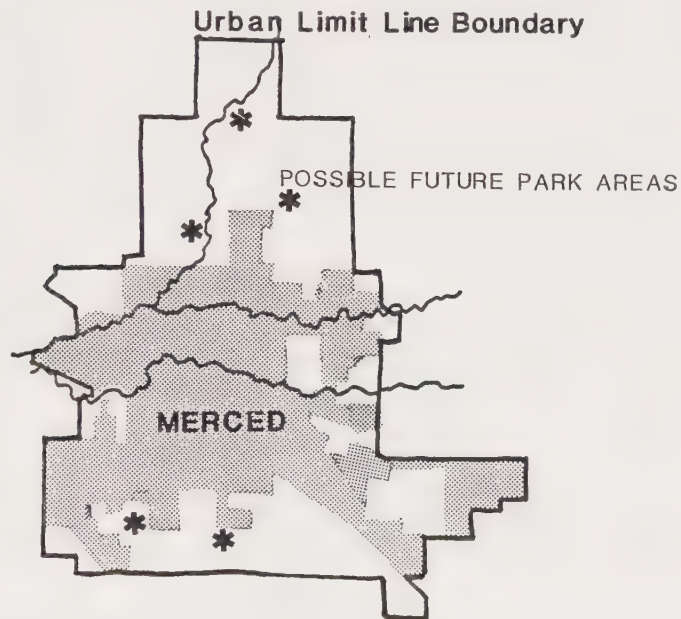
Selecting actual areas for new and improved park sites is based upon the above considerations as well as on locational factors such as walking distance, barriers which inhibit access and future unserved neighborhoods. Assuming that a half mile is the most distance people will walk to a neighborhood park and that they won't, or aren't able to, cross busy streets, creeks and railroads, then certain sections of the community are outside the service area of the park system. The Sydney Lane, Stretch Road, Bedford Drive, East Yosemite Avenue, Carmel Road, Brimmer Road and Gerard Avenue neighborhoods fall into this category of being too far or restricted from existing parks. Therefore, these are areas of opportunity. In addition to target areas for new parks, improvements can be made to existing parks to improve visibility, design and access.

Finally, serious consideration should be given to joint use facilities. To maximize the use of valuable land parks, schools, drainage basins and open space features should be combined where feasible. This opportunity is primarily available in newly developing sections of Merced where locations for each may be similar.

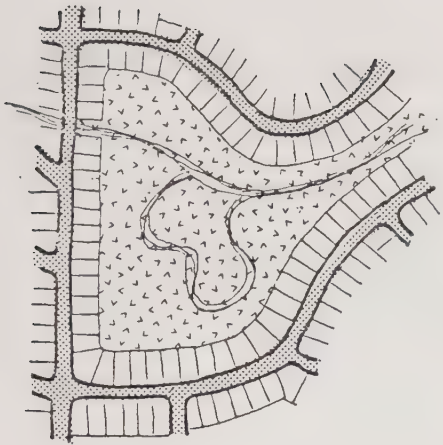
## KEY PARKS AND OPEN SPACE CONCEPTS



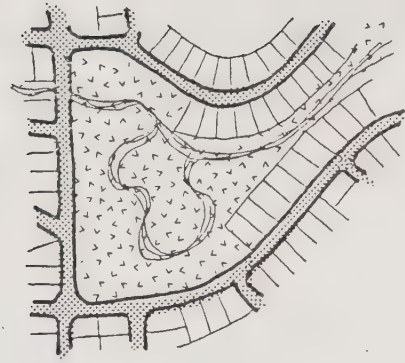
1. Develop a diverse and integrated system of park facilities throughout Merced including mini-parks, neighborhood parks, community parks and linear parks. They should be accessible to all age, social and economic groups and all geographic areas of the City.



2. Continue efforts to acquire new park sites within future growth areas in advance of development to meet the open space needs of an expanding population.

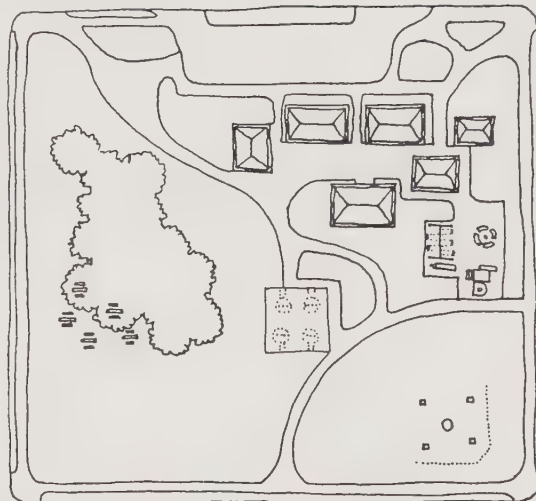


Not hidden and tucked away,



but open and accessible.

3. Provide visual, pedestrian and vehicular access to all parks. Accomplish this by requiring them to front on public streets on as many sides as possible and not be surrounded by privately owned property.



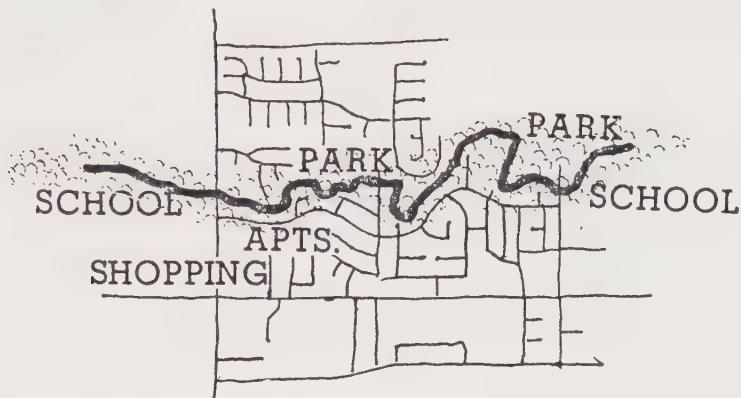
4. Combine park and schoolsites and facilities where possible.



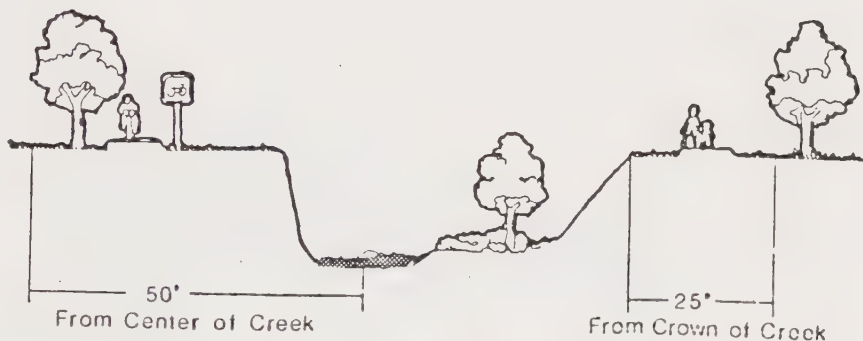
5. Preserve and protect open space elements such as creeks, stands of trees and scenic vistas within the City of Merced and in the path of future development.



6. Design park facilities so that a high level of maintenance will occur. This should include the use of sturdy and low maintenance plant materials, equipment and surfaces.

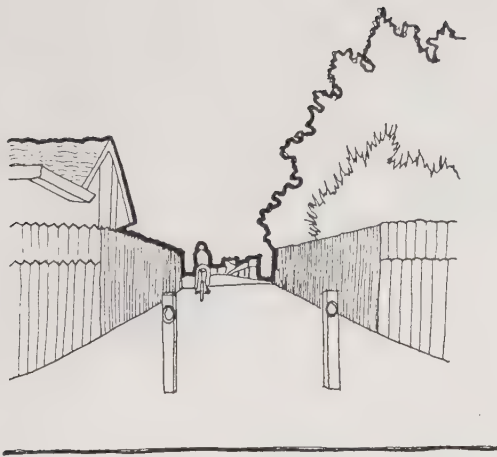


7. Link neighborhood and community parks through the use of linear parks, such as path systems and greenbelts.



8. Require a minimum 50 foot dedication from the creek centerline, or 25 feet from crown, which ever is greater, along all creeks within the planning area.



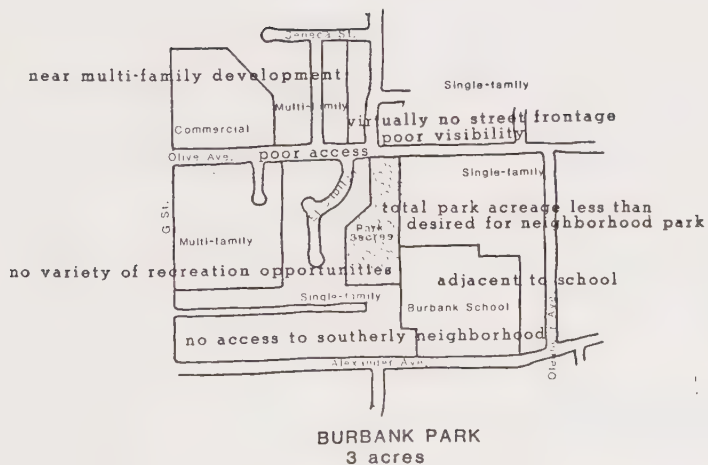
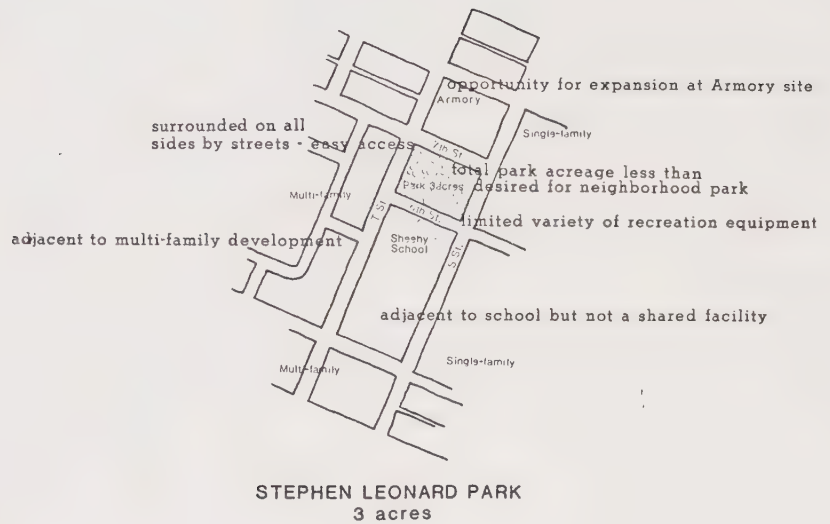
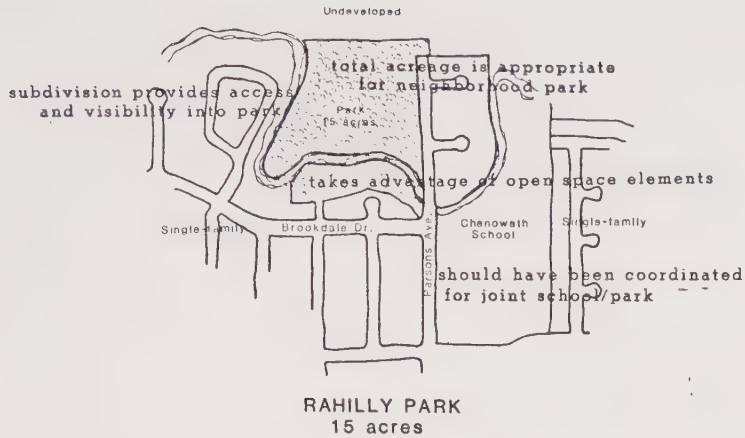


9. Provide access to nearby parks and linear parks from adjacent subdivisions (e.g., at the end of cul-de-sacs, access easements, etc.).



10. Continue development and high maintenance of valued city-wide street tree program.

## APPLICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS





## NEW PARK SITES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING EXISTING PARKS

The major focus of this Master Plan has been on developing criteria for the selection of new park and open space sites and improvements to existing sites to form a quality park and open space system for the City of Merced. Discussed in prior sections are the function of a parks system, problems and opportunities of each type of park within the system, value of open space, population characteristics and growth patterns, and implementation techniques. Based on the findings of these sections, 17 target areas have been established (not prioritized) which include new parks and/or improvements to the design of existing parks. Open space elements to be preserved are also designated.

1. Creekside Open Space along Fahrens Creek\*
2. Park Site within Fahrens Creek Specific Plan Area\*
3. Park Site within Northeast Yosemite Avenue Specific Plan Area\*
4. Creekside Open Space along Cottonwood Creek\*
5. Park Site and/or Bridge at Highway 59 and Santa Fe
6. Access from Alexander Avenue to Burbank Park
7. Bicycle/Pedestrian Bridge at Parsons Avenue
8. Add Odd-shaped Parcel to Ada Givens Park
9. Joint School Park Site at Lopez Avenue
10. Develop Armory Site
11. Joint School/Park at Tenaya School\*
12. Park Site near South N Street
13. Park Site near South G Street
14. Either Develop Galen Clark Site or Expand Flanagan Park\*
15. G Street Trees
16. Linear Park from Fahrens Creek to Lake Yosemite
17. Community Gardens

\*already designated on General Plan.

The following map graphically describes the 17 opportunity areas.



# LEGEND



Areas of Scenic Vistas

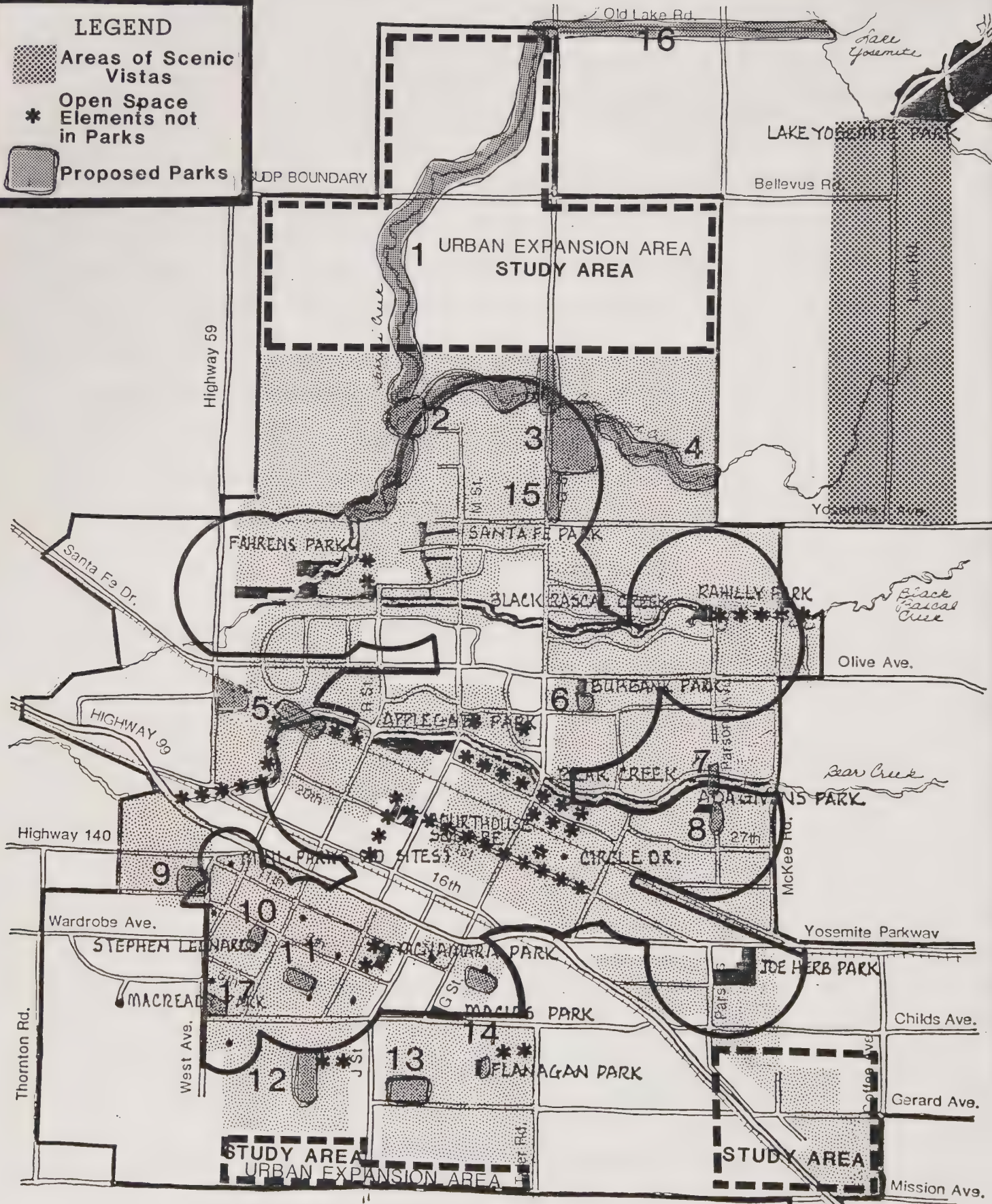


Open Space Elements not in Parks



Proposed Parks

UDP BOUNDARY



PROPOSED PARKS AND OPEN SPACE  
MASTER PLAN MAP

## RATIONALE BEHIND PROPOSED PARKS AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

### 1. Creekside Open Space along Fahrens Creek

to be acquired as development occurs

possibly as much as 150 acres

unknown how Corps of Engineers flood control project will affect

natural drainage course or natural vegetation

bicycle/pedestrian path

pocket parks

natural creekside amenities should be preserved for open space value

### 2. Park Site within Fahrens Creek Specific Area

5-10 acre neighborhood park

joint school/park concept could be used

natural creekside amenities could be preserved

access from Lehigh and major north/south street to ensure vehicular,

pedestrian and visual access

lot is privately owned - would require acquisition

### 3. Park Site within northeast Yosemite Avenue Specific Plan Area

20 acre neighborhood park

joint school/park concept could be used

drainage channel and Eucalyptus trees should be designed as open

space elements within the park

access from G Street and major east/west street (Dunn Road) to

ensure vehicular, pedestrian and visual access

lot is privately owned - would require acquisition

4. Creekside Open Space along Cottonwood Creek

to be acquired as development occurs

pedestrian/bicycle path

minimum 50' from centerline or 25' from crown width, however, Corps

project will affect the ultimate width

natural creekside amenities should be preserved for open space value

5. Park Site and Bridge

Park at Santa Fe and Highway 59:

5 acres

needed to serve existing and future high density 5,000

population neighborhood

all other locations within this vicinity have pending subdivi-

sion maps

a drainage basin is also needed within this area to accommodate

adjacent development

site is along high noise railroad and under highest noise

75-80 LdN aircraft and more suitable for parks than for

residences

site would be accessible from both sides of the railroad

-- both sides have high density residential

lots involved are privately owned - would require acquisition

Bridge for pedestrian/bicycles across Bear Creek where railroad pre-

sently crosses would provide at least some access to Applegate but

still is almost  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 mile to park

This project has been applied for under the Bike Lane Account

(Caltrans).



6. Access from Alexander Avenue to Burbank Park

Residential lot adjacent to School --  $93 \times 424 = .9$  acres

current access to Burbank is from busy Olive Avenue or through the school campus

access would be from Emerald Drive and Alexander neighborhoods

lot is privately owned - would require acquisition

or suggest to school district that the western fence be moved

eastward to allow continuous access to park

7. Bicycle/Pedestrian Bridge at Parsons Avenue

footbridge from north of the Creek to south of Creek

the Marie Lane/Bedford Drive neighborhood (2,000 population) is

nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 mile away from a park, although adjacent to Bear Creek

access is presently inhibited to the south between McKee Road and

G Street - nearly  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles

Ada Givens Park is only a few blocks away but is inaccessible

To date, Parsons Avenue extension has not been approved by the City Council. However, if approved, the street extension could provide a similar function.

8. Add Odd-shaped Parcel to Ada Givens Park

If Parsons Avenue is extended to serve undeveloped parcels, there will be a triangular shaped parcel on the west side of the street which will be too narrow to develop.

if added to the park it will provide visual, vehicular, pedestrian access to the park; something which is lacking in the present design of Ada Givens Park

lot is privately owned - would require acquisition



9. Joint School/Park Site at Lopez Avenue

the School District is currently looking at developing 10 acres in  
this location

park is also needed in the Sydney Lane area - future population  
2,500 people

joint development of park/school is cost effective and land  
efficient for both

privately owned - would require acquisition

10. Develop Armory Site

land is partially vacant - owned by State of California

approximate half of 2.9 acres is available for park use

would expand Stephen Leonard Park (2.7 acres)

possibility of closing street (7th) to join the two sites

frontage improvements already in which reduces initial development  
costs

near high density residential neighborhood

11. Joint School/Park at Tenaya School

school is 20 acres, park area would be about 8 acres

frontage improvements already in which reduces development costs

land is available and partially developed already

school and parks have common facilities which could be enhanced  
within 70-75 LdN noise zone

near high density residential neighborhood

12. Park Site at South N Street

17± acres in southwest Merced

future population of 4,000

area is  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles away from nearest park

- drainage basin may also be necessary at or near this location -  
could be shared facility  
access would be from N Street, Gerard and maybe two other streets  
ensuring vehicular, pedestrian and visual access  
canal runs along south end of property - possibility of designing  
this open space element into park  
centrally located to this future neighborhood

13. Park Site at Gerard and G Street

10± acres

future population of area about 5,000 people

area currently served by Macias park and Flanagan Park (8-9 acres  
total)

drainage basin also necessary in this general location

proposed subdivision (Reich Manor) will be dedicating about 5 acres  
when final map is accepted

access from Gerard and G Streets would ensure vehicular, pedestrian  
and visual access

canal runs along Gerard - could be used as water feature

lots privately owned - would require acquisition

14. Develop Galen Clark Site and/or Expand Flanagan Park

Temporarily use Galen Clark site which is already available - owned  
by School District

improvements already in

in 75-80 LdN - not suitable for schools or living  
presently vacant

temporary use would be turf and minor recreation equipment

- surrounded by high density neighborhood on two sides, Hospital and Fairgrounds on other sides; however, not many people live nearby as barriers to accessibility surround the site about 10 acres

Flanagan Park is presently 3.8 acres

proposal would add 4 to 5 acres

would be more accessible to new population

lot is privately owned - would require acquisition

#### 15. G Street Trees

significant large trees on G Street north of Yosemite Avenue are a valuable asset

they act as a "gateway" into Merced from Snelling Road

could be incorporated into a bike/pedestrianway similar to M Street trees

#### 16. Linear Park from Fahrens Creek to Lake Yosemite

need to connect "west side" parks to Lake

Fahrens Creek park extends to Old Lake Road

connections could be made along Farmland or Old Lake Road

Old Lake Road is preferable - fewer traffic problems potentially,

more scenic, more natural link between the two

would require cooperation with the County

## 17. Community Gardens

the existing community garden at Childs and First Street is quite successful

other vacant properties with appropriate water hook-ups could be used, at least temporarily, as a community garden

sites need to be selected when need arises

most available land owned by private property owners - would require consent or acquisition

## Study Areas

Three study areas are proposed because insufficient data was available at the time of this report to select specific park sites. The Urban Expansion Area north of the city has yet to be designated for land uses, circulation or open spaces in the General Plan. Therefore, specific parks and open space sites are not proposed at this time. Likewise, the Urban Expansion Area south of the city has yet to be designated in the General Plan. Therefore, this area may also warrant further study. The Farmer's Insurance/Alfarata Ranch area is also a proposed study area. A Planned Development zone is currently being proposed for 100 acres of the Alfarata Ranch. Park sites for this future neighborhood and the immediate area will be considered during the planned development approval process.





## IMPLEMENTATION

### History

From its beginning until the 1970's, the City's park system grew at a moderate rate. During the last decade, however, it grew by leaps and bounds. In 1970, there were 47 acres of developed park land as compared to 133 acres in 1980. A number of factors contributed to this situation. First, the majority of the park sites were acquired prior to 1970. As a result, funding emphasis was placed on development rather than acquisition. Second, a strong local, state and national economy provided an increase in grants and other funding sources. The following is a description of those funding sources.

Sales Tax Revenue. During the early to mid 1970's, 25¢ of every \$1.00 of sales tax revenue received by the City was placed in the capital improvement fund. Unfortunately, budget constraints during the late 1970's precluded the use of sales tax revenue for capital projects. Since that time, this funding source has been used to operate various City departments.

Park Fees. In 1972, the City enacted its Park Land Dedication and Fees Ordinance. Developers of new subdivisions were required to dedicate land and/or pay fees in order to provide park and recreation facilities to serve the inhabitants of their subdivision. Dedication of land was required when a park or recreation facility was designated in the City's General Plan or a park master plan and was located in whole or in part within the proposed subdivision.

The amount of land dedicated was determined by standards set forth by the City Council. If dedication was not required, in lieu fees were paid as follows:

- a. \$250 for each single-family unit
- b. \$150 for each multi-family unit
- c. \$125 for each mobile home

State and Federal Grants. The 1970's saw unprecedented growth in the availability of state and federal grants. Funds were available through a variety of agencies for the acquisition and development of park and recreation facilities. Examples of projects accomplished through grant funds are: Stephen Leonard Recreation Center, Bear Creek Parkway, Rahilly Park and the mini parks.

#### Current and Future Methods of Financing

The 1980's brought about a sagging national economy, high unemployment and increased public concern with spending at all levels of government. These conditions are drastically reducing grants for local government programs and projects.

In the absence of grants, the City of Merced is depending on local funding sources for the acquisition and development of its park system. A majority of this funding has been provided by park dedication fees. Recent changes in the Park Land Dedication and Fees Ordinance have resulted in the use of the following density formula to determine the land dedication and in lieu fees required:

$$\frac{5(D.U. \times D.F.)}{1,000} = \text{Land Dedication Requirement}$$

The formula is based upon a goal of five acres of park land for every one thousand people. Each subdivision is evaluated on the number of dwelling units contained and the resulting population generated. Population is determined by multiplying the number of units by the population density factor for each type of housing (i.e., single-family, multi-family). Density factors currently in use are as follows:

- a. 3.2 persons for single-family and duplex residences
- b. 2.0 persons for multi-family residences
- c. 1.63 persons for mobile home

Dedication of land is required if a park and recreation facility designated in the City's General Plan or a park master plan is located in whole or in part within the proposed subdivision. If this is not the case, fees are required in an amount equal to the fair market value of land which would have been dedicated.

The ordinance further requires that the fees be used for projects within a three quarter mile radius of the subdivision from which they were generated. Prior to the beginning of the 1983-84 fiscal year, eleven park planning districts were established, the purpose of which is to monitor revenue and expenditures within the fund and to insure that revenue collected is utilized for park projects within the areas from which it was generated.

In the future the development of parks throughout the city will depend upon residential construction and the subsequent dedication of land and/or payment of fees thereof within these districts. State and federal resources will represent only a small portion of the funds necessary to develop and acquire future parks.

#### Park Design as It Relates to Maintenance Costs

Designing a park is no easy task. Typically there are initial development and maintenance budget constraints. The size of the park may limit the inclusion of certain activities. Changing community needs may require flexibility or design modifications. Preserving natural amenities may require special attention. To respond effectively to these challenges, a high quality design is essential.

The first step in the park design process is identifying the purpose or function. What type of activities is it to accommodate? What special site constraints, or assets, should be considered? Is the project intended to serve small children, senior citizens, families or the entire community? How



can the project benefit the community as a whole? In other words, a program must be developed which sets forth the factors to be considered and the requirements to be met by the park design.

Equally as important as function is the ability to maintain the park. A good design cannot achieve the desired results if it is improperly maintained or if it requires excessive maintenance. The object is to find ways to reduce maintenance and replacement costs without eliminating the very features that make people want to visit a park.

Park maintenance involves many factors. Examples are basic care of plants such as watering and pruning, replacing plant materials and sprinkler equipment damaged through vandalism, repairing of equipment or surfaced areas, general cleanup, erosion control, etc. These tasks require personnel, materials and equipment which affect maintenance costs. However, through proper park design many of these costs can be reduced.

How can maintenance costs be reduced? In general, it means using sturdy, easy-to-maintain plant species, equipment and surfaces. The proper amount and types of landscaping will depend on a site's uses and location. Conceivably a heavily used park or play area might be surfaced largely with asphalt, concrete or other hard materials, although some sort of planting is usually appropriate. Trees are especially desirable. Still, there are some situations where heavy vegetation and seclusion from the urban area are necessary for the desired recreation experience. The idea is to promote the use with a low maintenance design to reduce the number and length of maintenance visits to parks. Some examples of low maintenance design follow:

- A. Shift from formal-type mowed lawns to a natural "meadow" concept in certain areas of parks where nature walks, picnicking and general frolicking are major activities. Examples of where this could be used are in

portions of Fahrens and Rahilly Parks. Mowing would then be less frequent. Edging or watering would also be needed less.

- B. Select plants which are tolerant to Merced's climate and soil conditions. Care and cultivation of plants, especially exotic plants, require constant attention. Wild flowers and trees with blooms and/or colored foliage can add color just as roses and chrysanthemums, but are less costly to maintain.
- C. Preserve some of Merced's natural amenities in their existing state. Many of the city's open space features have evolved and survived many years already without a high degree of maintenance. Creekside areas, stands of Eucalyptus trees and their natural understory are examples of park features which require very little "manicured" maintenance.
- D. Use such things as decomposed granite or hard-packed dirt/clay instead of a formal lawn in certain areas of parks where hard-court games are played or where nature walks take place or even under heavily landscaped areas. This eliminates mowing, edging, fertilizing and watering required of a typical lawn and reduces the headache of trying to keep up a manicured look.
- E. If hard surfaces are not desired yet turf is still too costly to maintain, groundcover (low-level shrubs) may be an alternative. Not all parks require turfed areas throughout. Groundcover gives an equal feeling of greenery, freshness and open space; however, it may be less useful for active recreation. It reduces the watering requirements and eliminates the need for routine mowing and edging. It does, however, require occasional pruning, weeding and replacement.

- F. Ornamental flower beds, specialized gardens and other formal landscaping generally require a great deal of time to maintain. Colorful, low maintenance shrubs and trees can be just as inviting and pleasing to the eye, if designed properly, as fancy gardens, and are sometimes half as costly.
- G. High use areas tend to wear down whatever landscaping has been provided, be it turf or a divergent path through a groundcover area. If these high use areas develop because of pedestrian or bicycle traffic, paving should be considered as a solution. In general, pavement is less costly to maintain than the constant attention required to replace or strengthen over-used landscaped areas.

These are some ideas which should be kept in mind as new parks are designed and as problems in existing parks arise due to maintenance requirements.



U.C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



C124888057

This report was prepared by Karen C. Musker, Assistant Planner, City of Merced Planning Department. Cover design was by Richard E. Patenaude, Planner I, City of Merced Planning Department.



